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["I DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR COUNTENANCE," MARY SAID, "BUT I DO CARE THAT YOU KEEP MY SECRET!"]

THE GARDENER'S DAUGHTER.

—30—

CHAPTER XVIII.

As promised on the Monday afternoon, about four o'clock a very neat green brougham, and oh, joy! a pair of horses, came to take Mrs. and Miss Meadows to their lodgings in Rodney-place, Caversham!

They had nothing to remove but themselves and the cat, as their boxes had gone by earlier; and they simply looked the front door after them, stepped into the carriage and drove away.

"Dear, dear, dear!" said Mrs. Meadows, as she folded her hands in her lap, and tried to roll back against the blue poplin cushions. "Now, I call this something like! I do like a drive, and I've not been in a proper turn-out since the day you was—married! Law, what a nasty drizzling day it was, to be sure! Of course, I was in the mourning coach at poor John's funeral; but then I scarcely count that a drive!" she continued, naively. "I suppose you told Miss Darvall of our flitting, eh?"

"Yes, mother. I wrote to her last night, and sent the letter by post, for you know I've no way of sending it up to the place, and I would not go myself."

"To be sure not. A lady with two fortunes going her own messages! That would be a nice business!"

"It's not that; and I have no fortune yet, you know, mother. Do not let us be too sanguine!"

"Sanguine! What does that mean? You have got such a heap of grand words now, I don't know what half of them stand for!" said Mrs. Meadows, peevishly.

"Well, do not let us count our chickens before they are hatched. You can understand that, can you not?"

"I can't understand you! Instead of being nearly wild with joy, you are just as quiet and cool as if we are going in—the bus—to do a bit of shopping."

"Then, if nothing comes of this, I shall not be so much cast down, you see!"

"Oh, you are too sensible for me," said the old woman, crossly, leaning back, and assuming an aspect of a martyr.

She did not break silence again till they drew up before a very imposing row of houses, with gardens in front of them, and found that the rooms that had been taken for them were, as Mrs. Meadows whispered to her daughter, "Not a penny under three guineas a-week; fires and gas, extra!"

They were to have a drawing-room with three windows—a crucial symptom of gentility in Caversham—a dining-room at the back, and two large and airy bed-rooms. A comfortable high tea was awaiting them; and, as Mrs. Meadows partook of that beverage out of her saucer, and supported her right elbow with her left hand, she told her companion, as she look around the apartment, "That she really began to feel that they were in for some luck at last. And time for them!"

Humpty, according to his invariable custom, came to visit after dark, and informed them that, on the next evening, he would be accompanied by two other people—namely, a person who was interested in the case and a local lawyer.

"You will have nothing to do, Mrs. Meadows and Mary, but sit and listen, and answer

one or two questions. A dressmaker is coming in the morning to get your orders for some new clothes, and don't spare the money, Mary."

"Whose is it that I am not to spare?" she asked, frankly.

"Mine!"

"But I could not think of taking it."

"You are not going to show any airs with me? And if the worst comes to the worst you can pay me back."

"I should like to see the means first. Under any circumstances, we will defer laying out any money till after this interview to-morrow."

"There she goes, as usual, Mr. Montagu," groaned Mrs. Meadows. "flinging your good kind offer in your face. Ah! dear me; but she is the stiff-necked one, and hard to be managed!"

"Never mind, mother. If I am to have this fortune one day is not much to wait, and then you shall have a fly, and go right off to 'Cavendish House,' and buy just whatever you like. Black silk dress, sea-kin petticoat, a velvet cloak—anything! Meanwhile let us just keep quiet for twenty-four hours."

The next evening, after dark, three men were ushered into Mrs. Meadows' drawing-room. Bound by chains of old habits of economies, Mrs. Meadows and Mary were sitting by the fire light, thinking it was too early for candles. Humphy, in a fine-lined coat, introduced Mr. Legg from America, and Mr. Gibson, a local lawyer.

It was too dark to see their faces, and whilst Mrs. Meadows dropped curtains and handed chairs, Mary rang for lights. When the lights were brought, her eyes first sought this stranger from America.

She glanced eagerly towards him, with a beating heart. Could he be her father? He was a common-looking, weather-beaten man, with broad shoulders, a red head, and huge coarse hands. He looked like a labourer in Sunday clothes.

She was disappointed as she gazed at him for about five slow seconds; and he, on his part, had his eyes riveted on her. At length he said, with a nasal drawl,—

"I guess we are on the right track, stranger! I guess this is the girl. I reckon she is just as like him as two drops of water!"

"Like who?" inquired Mrs. Meadows, eagerly.

"Like her father as I take it to be, ma'm. Like Godfrey Darvall, if you knew such a person."

"Save us, and send us!" ejaculated the old woman, clasping her hands together, and falling back in her chair.

"I've seen the likeness this long time," remarked Humphy. "I'm glad you noticed it, too, Legg; so it's not imagination. And now we had better get to business. You tell your story first, or shall I tell mine? and Mr. Gibson will make notes and piece all together in a regular professional way."

"Oh, you go on right away," said the American, putting a quid of tobacco in his mouth, and then thrusting his hands into his pockets, and stretching out his long legs.

"I know Godfrey Darvall from the time he was a boy," began Humphy; "he was Mr. Darvall's only surviving child, curbed in some ways, and spoiled in others; on the whole, he turned out wonderfully well. He went to Eton, then into the army, but his father objecting to his going abroad he sold out, and settled down to the lazy life of an idle man, with nothing to do but kill time and spend money. He shot and hunted, and yachted, and went through the usual fashionable routine, and many thousands of pounds into the bargain. His father paid his debts for him three over, and we had stormy scenes at Daneford. However, all would go on velvet if Godfrey would marry and settle. His father was bent on his wedding the daughter of a peer—a personal friend of his own—a plain, good, girl, with a fair fortune. The negotiations had actually been opened. Godfrey had stayed at the Earl's country seat. Settlements

were mooted. Still Godfrey, who seemed unusually low-spirited, and quite unlike himself, had not asked the momentous question. His father was impatient at his delay with the lady; and her father and his own parent goaded him to take the leap and have it over; but still the young man hung back. I know that he was in trouble, for more than once he had said,—

"Horace, I'm in a desperate scrape this time!"

"I asked him to confide in me. I asked him if it was about money."

"Yes," he said, "money and worse! You will know it all some day. My father must know first, and I don't know how I am to tell him! He will be frantic! However, tell him he did, and I shall never forget that night."

"Darvall was a violent man, and he often raised his voice and shouted in his rages; but on this occasion his voice was a roar; he was like a lunatic. I was waiting in the inner-room, and he and Godfrey were alone in the library. At last I ventured to open the door and look in. The old man was livid with passion, his face worked so awfully that I thought he was going to have an apopleptic fit."

"Godfrey was as pale as marble, but quite as still. He had said his say, and made his unpleasant confession, that was very plain. His father suddenly turned to me, when he heard me enter, and shouted,—

"Do you see that man, Montague? I take you to witness he is no son of mine! He has disgraced me. Here!" and he flung open the door into the hall,—and here!" rushing to the big entrance door, which he tore open, and cried, "Go forth!—go forth, Godfrey Darvall! Never let me see your face again!"

Here the speaker paused for a moment, and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, whilst his audience waited for his next sentence with breathless suspense.

"I spoke," he continued, "I expostulated, I ventured to say a word, but I might as well have addressed a raging storm. He seized his son by the arm—Godfrey was in evening dress—and thrust him forth with his own hand, head-down, into the night. He never saw him again, and many a time he bitterly repented him of his deed—oh! many and many a time!"

"And what became of Godfrey Darvall?" asked the lawyer, who had been making notes in a little book, with a face of wooden impassibility.

"He was never seen again by anyone about the place. His luggage was sent to an hotel in Chesham, and his room was locked. The whole affair broke his mother's heart, and, indeed, Darvall himself soon followed her."

"What had he done—Godfrey Darvall?"

"He had married a pretty chorus-singer out of one of the London theatres—respectable, but still only a chorus-singer. I got a line from him about six months after the quarrel to say that he was on the eve of sailing for America. And now, Mr. Legg, your story comes in," he continued, looking at the Yankee.

"Well, yes; I suppose it does!"

"It was in the year sixty-four, about March, I was going by sea from Boston to New Orleans, and we had from the time we cleared out, uncommon dirty weather. We had a heavy cargo, and only three or four passengers. I was steerage, so was another chap—a Britisher, and a gentleman. We chummed together, and talked and smoked for fully a fortnight, whilst the old steamer was knocking about, and working her way south. Folks talks a lot for want of something to do, and I told him a pretty fair allowance; and he did the same by me. He said his name was Godfrey Darvall, and he had made a mess of his whole life, and was going to try and start afresh in the New World—that he had friends at New Orleans. He said his father was a rich man, and that he had quarrelled with him, and cut him off with nothing, that his wife was dead, and that he had left a child in England—a girl about four months old. He told

me he had left her in the way of the head-gardener at his own home, and he had seen him carry it off to his wife; that they would not know whose it was, and he did not mean them to know yet; but after awhile he said he would write and tell them, and send them money. He said he saw his way to earning a fortune in Mexico.

"He was a very good-looking fellow—dark; but he seemed terribly down on his luck. As I have said, we got to know one another very well in a short time, and when we reached New Orleans we decided to throw in our lot together. He was disappointed about his friends—they were fine-weather ones. He could get nothing to do, and he and I joined a gang of miners that were going to work an old silver mine in Brazil. We were on that job for more than a year, and he was promoted to be a kind of overseer and clerk, being better with his head than his hands. He saved his pay, which was pretty good, as he neither drank, or played poker, or enoch, and he sent it home in a letter by a fellow going to Europe; but, from what I make out, it never got further than the rascal's own pocket. We had a very rough lot about us, who thought nothing of using revolvers and bowie-knives. Darvall had his hands pretty full, and was footsore; I often warned him, and my warning came true. One day, in trying to keep the peace between a couple of those desperadoes, he got an ugly stab in the side, and—~~he~~ killed him."

"How long ago was that?" asked the lawyer.

"Oh! a matter of eighteen years."

"Aye, in the month of June, about nine o'clock of an evening," supplemented Mrs. Meadows, eagerly.

"Just so, missus! But how the creation do you know?"

"It was the picture; it always falls when one of the family dies. I was in the home that evening, and I heard an awful clatter, and a sound as if a cannon had gone off in the dining-room; and we ran in—John and me—and there was the picture down on its face. And I remember my husband saying to me, 'Depend on it, Jessie, this is for Mr. Godfrey,' and he wrote down the day and hour and date on the leaf of a book I have at home; and that's how I come to know it, Mr. Legg! The picture never fails."

"Well, he died in the month of June—just at the time I'm telling you—just as the moon was rising behind the big mountain peaks; I mind it well. He died with his hand in mine. He gave me a pocket-book to take care of, and he told me to write two letters, and I did. After we buried him, and all his effects were sold, I wrote one to Mr. Darvall, and told him his son was gone, and where to find his grandchild. And, after a good spell, my own letter came back, with 'dead' written across it. Then I wrote to the clergyman—by name—and got no answer; so I gave it up. There was no money in the pocket-book—nothing beyond a few letters and certificates, and a lock of hair; and as I had a tooth-and-nail struggle to keep myself afloat at all, I let Darvall's business slide, and I never thought of it again till I saw an advertisement in half-a-dozen newspapers. 'Wanted, any person who can afford particulars of the death of Godfrey Darvall, Englishman; supposed to have left England twenty years ago. For authenticated proofs, large reward will be given. Apply, etc.' That was about it, eh? I saw this in two or three papers in New York on the same day, and then I sloped off to the office, where they said 'Apply,' and I had a talk with the head 'Bos,' and I told him of the papers and that, and he said he would make it worth my while to go to Europe, and swear to them; and he parted with the address freely, and so here I am, and here's the pocket-book!" handing it over to Mary as he concluded.

"Then you think she is Godfrey Darvall's daughter?" said Mrs. Meadows, "and mistress of the place? Dear! dear! dear!"

"There seems to be but little doubt," returned the lawyer. "You, ma'am, can swear to her being the child brought home by your husband, can you not?"

"Aye, I can do that."

"Mr. Logg can swear to Mr. Godfrey Darvall's statement. The ring found on her is an old family ring, and in that pocket-book is her mother's marriage, and her own baptismal certificates. I fancy the case is quite correct, but it will take time to complete the whole business; and there will no doubt be violent opposition from the present Mr. Darvall of Daneford."

"It is my opinion that he is an impostor," growled Humpy.

"Do not make such rash statements, my dear sir," exclaimed the lawyer, with true professional caution. "Such a remark, were he to hear it, would be the means of his taking an action for libel. Of course, Godfrey Darvall's daughter takes all, being the heiress in a direct line. He cannot claim a shilling! He may go back to Australia as soon as he likes, once we move in the business!"

"That seems rather hard," remarked Mary, who had opened and looked over the contents of the pocket-book, "to have to go back all at once from riches to poverty. Could he not what is called effect a compromise?"

"Oh, no doubt, but we won't," said the Secretary. "Why should we? Why should we be so generous to Benjamin Darvall?"

"Because his daughter is a friend of mine, I cannot say that he is; I don't like him. I notice that my real name in this"—holding out a strip of paper—"is Marie, so that I shall not have to change my Christian name—'Marie Veronica'!"

"Yes, Veronica was Mrs. Darvall's name. You are called after your grandmother."

"Grandmother! How odd it sounds, does it not, mother?" turning to the old woman.

"Oh, everything is strange! I don't well know whether I'm awake or asleep, or if this whole business is not a dream. To think of them saying that you, Mary—that's been in service—that's been reared—well, to work for your bread—that you should turn out, after all these years, to be just living at the lodge, and opening the gates belonging to your own house! I can't get it fairly into my head—that I can't—and so I tell you!"

"The next thing that we can do then, Mrs. Meadows," said Humpy, rising, "is to go away and leave you by yourselves, to think it all over quietly. People very soon get accustomed to prosperity and to a rise in life, coupled with a large fortune. It's the reverse of the shield that is so hard to bring home to oneself—loss of position, name, friends, and money."

After a little more conversation, and arrangements for a meeting at Mr. Gibson's office on the following day, the three visitors withdrew.

After their departure, Mary sat in silence for nearly an hour. With reverent fingers, she went over the contents of the pocket-book two or three times. It contained two little notes in faded writing, signed Marie Flude, a lock of fair hair, a marriage certificate, with the names of "Godfrey Darvall, bachelor, gentleman—Marie Flude, spinster, professional singer;" also a baptismal certificate of her own christening. She had been christened at Caversham—probably she was born there; and strange to say, by a remarkable coincidence, she had been christened at St. James's Church!

"Let us have tea, Mary," said Mrs. Meadows, suddenly coming out of a very long reverie. "I want something to clear my brain. Ring the bell; we will have the best that's going—four shillings a pound—crumpets, and fresh butter!"

Men, when they have luck, toast Dame Fortune in champagne—women, if left to themselves, perform the rite in strong Bohemian.

CHAPTER XIX.

It would be hard to picture or describe the great change that a sudden accession of wealth occasions in the lives of those who have been reared in poverty. I do not think it makes them very much happier than they were before. Doubtless it does to a certain extent, but riches have their drawbacks—their anxieties. They bring troops of would-be friends, and in their train a fine supply of envy, hypocrisy, and malice.

To be living in a cottage, toiling with her needle from morning till night, turning every sixpence over ten times in her mind before laying it out, eating scanty meals, wearing shabby clothes, and being 'figuratively' as the dust under the feet of the servants at The Place—who had heard of her elopement with a gentleman—was Mary's lot, say, one week, and the next she found herself no longer a nameless foundling, but the scion of an old, and all but noble family; no longer as poor as the proverbial church mouse, but the owner of hundreds of acres, and thousands of pounds.

Naturally, when the news of the long-lost heiress was carried to Daneford Place, Mr. and Mrs. Darvall angrily refused to listen to it at first, refused to believe in it afterwards; but after a lengthy interview with his lawyer Mr. Darvall looked uncommonly grave—also Captain Burn, who had accompanied him to London—and despite Mr. Darvall's white-faced fury and invocations, absolutely declined to "fight it."

"We have no case, Sharp says; not a leg to stand on. A son's child comes before a cousin's son!"

"I don't believe she is a Darvall at all!" cried his wife.

"Oh, yes, she is, and they say bears a strong likeness to the family."

"Very odd no one remarked it before."

"Well, people have often said that she looked as if she had good blood in her veins. You know that."

"Pooh! Just because she was a pretty girl—a hateful, sly, designing minx!" said Mrs. Darvall, between her set teeth. "I'll (to herself) pay her out for it yet."

"Are you going to take her offer?"

"Of course I am. She's not going to ask for back-rents, and she has offered to allow us to stay on here for the present."

"That means till she marries."

"And she is going to allow me a handsome income, in consideration of my disappointment"—then Mr. Darvall looked meaningfully at Captain Burn, who gave a queer, sharp kind of laugh—"and of my being her cousin and nearest of kin; and I'm going to take her offer."

"If you had a spark of spirit you would throw her proposals back in her face, and stay here and maintain your rights till you lost them by law," said Mrs. Darvall.

"That's so like a woman, or a child even!" put in Captain Burn. "Stay here, indeed! Maintain his rights! Why, my good madam, according to law, he is an interloper, and has no rights. I must say that I think the girl Mary Meadows—or Darvall—has behaved with uncommon generosity, and I believe it's partly on Julia's account. She is fond of Julia."

"She is an abominable creature," cried Mrs. Darvall. "You know she went away from Cream-street without a shred of character!"

"Got into the wrong train by mistake!" put in Captain Burn, plausibly. "I don't see that there was anything so very bad in that."

"And Captain Eliot got into the wrong train by mistake also," returned Mrs. Darvall, ferociously. "Oh, you need not try to throw dust in my eyes—I'm no fool!"

"No one ever dreamt of such a thing as the word fool in the same breath as your name. I don't know any woman who is sharper at putting two and two together in her own interests than yourself," retorted Captain Burn.

"By Jove!" interrupted Mr. Darvall, anxious to end this passage of tongues, "I wonder what Eliot will say when he hears it. It will be rather awkward for them, being such near neighbours."

"Oh, she does not like Daneford, and won't stay here, I'm sure, even supposing we had left. And as to Eliot, he is a rolling-stone and never at home. He is up the Nile with his regiment at present, and I heard the other day that he had fever very badly. It's as likely as not that he will never come back," said Captain Burn, with complete unconcern. "You and Mrs. Darvall will, I suppose, go into Caversham and call on the new relation?" he added, with a grin.

"If you mean that I am going to call on Mary Meadows you are much mistaken," retorted Mrs. Darvall, with a violent sniff and a toss of her head. "A creature that was in my own service, and left without a character!"

"A creature to whom you owe the very roof over your head at present," said her husband. "I don't care for the young woman—never did; but we must not let that stand in our way. You will have to hammer it into your head, Mary Ann, that she is, and always was, Miss Darvall; that this is her house, and that all the money belongs to her, and not to us. Can you get that into your understanding?"

"No, I can't. It's my opinion that there has been a lot of cheating somewhere," she exclaimed, rising, and pushing her chair back as she spoke. "And, mark my words, you two gentlemen. As sure as I stand here it will all be found out some day," and with this prophecy Mrs. Darvall quitted the room.

After her departure her husband poured himself out some brandy, which he took off neat, and then looked over at his friend, and winked expressively.

"We have come out of it better than I expected," he said.

"Faith, you may say so. Half a loaf is better than no bread; but you must keep the old lady's mouth shut!"

This was easier said than done.

The few weeks immediately succeeding the establishment of Mary's claims were undoubtedly the happiest in Mrs. Meadows's whole life—happier than her youth, her early married life, her middle age. The most ecstatic moments were those when she was seated at a counter in the most fashionable shop in Caversham, feeling and looking at rich silks and costly satins, or when she slipped her bony old figure into one long sealakin paletot after another, or tried on bonnet and cap, cap and bonnet. It was also very agreeable to her feelings to step out of a nice (hired) brougham, and to be received with deference by one of the shop-walkers, and escorted in a kind of procession to whatever apartment she chose to patronise, bearing Mary in her train.

Mary, now dressed in a totally different style as Miss Darvall, and in a velvet and sable paletot, and toque to match, looked as if she had never been accustomed to any less magnificent style of garments, much less a shabby old waterproof and a two shilling straw hat!

Julia, who met her quite accidentally in the Mall, would have passed her, so great was the transformation in her appearance. When she recognised her she was overwhelmed, and stood and stared.

"Mary! Of course it is Mary! How different you look, and what a wonderful thing it is this discovery about you! I cannot grasp it yet."

"Yes, come in here with me," stopping at the door of a confectioner's, "and let us talk about it. I can hardly realise it yet myself. Waiter, two strawberry ices, please!"

"No more can I," said Julia; "and to think of your being Miss Darvall of Daneford all the time—at least, not all the time, for you and I know that you are not Miss Darvall at all!"

Mary flushed slightly and said, as she removed her gloves,—

"Yes, I am! I never mean to take a name that was, as it were, flung at me. Please don't allude to the subject. You—you know I hate it. You and I are cousins now—is not that nice?"

"Very!" kissing her. "You got my letter, of course? I believe you have been awfully good and generous to us—even papa says so. He and Mrs. D. have come in to-day on purpose to pay you a State visit. And you are out."

"Yes, as you see; and between ourselves, 'Ju,' I'm not sorry," said Mary, frankly. "The last time, you know, that Mrs. Martin (as she then was) spoke to me was after that horrible trip to Folkestone, and she called me a 'brazen-faced hussy.' We must allow a little more time to elapse before we can meet with decent appearance of civility."

"They are going to ask you to Daneford to stay!"

"And I shall decline their kind invitation. I don't like Daneford. It's a gloomy, unlucky sort of place."

"And it is no self-sacrifice to let us stay on," said Julia, with a laugh. "Father said of course we would turn out when you were married, and I could scarcely keep my countenance."

"I don't care about your countenance, but I do care that you keep my secret. Remember that, Ju!"

"I remember. And now what are your plans? Where are you going to live? Mary, you look lovely in that cap and furs!" she added, impetuously.

"We are going to live at the seaside. After our humble life near here, we could never settle in Caversham. I believe I have afforded the people a fine nine days' wonder! Mrs. Meadows has a fancy for the sea, and we have taken a large house on the Lees at Folkestone, and whenever we are settled I shall expect you to come and stay with me, cousin Julia."

"And so I will, cousin Mary, with the greatest pleasure! But why did you pitch on Folkestone, of all places?"

"It was not I that settled it; it was chiefly our solicitor, whose friend's house he wanted to let; and as we can take it over—servants, furniture, plate, linen, and all, it suits us—and we are not likely to be as much noticed there, where strangers come and go all the year round, as elsewhere. We pass in the crowd."

"Yes; you will simply be known as Miss Darvall, the heiress, as I once was," said Julia, sipping her ice. "How funny it seems! And what about Mrs. Meadows? What are you going to do with her?"

"She is to all intents and purposes my mother, and I shall expect her to be treated as such."

"What a lucky old woman! And you, Marie—I shall call you Marie—what star were you born under, I wonder? Fate has been good to you."

"In some ways, and only lately. For the last twenty years Fate has turned her back on me, and fortune has cut me dead. There! I see the carriage opposite—at the library. You had better run over and say nothing about me dear. I really could not face your father and Mrs. Darvall in a proper spirit, though I shall arrive at it some day."

"Yes, there is the carriage, your carriage, Marie," rising hastily. "Everything we have is yours. I don't know how you can be so generous to us; it is not natural."

"Yes, it is, because I like you. Is not that natural, cousin Ju? Now you really must hurry away! Come in and see me by yourself to-morrow."

The house which Miss Darvall, the heiress (who, from quite humble circumstances, had come into a great fortune, to quote the gossips of the town), had taken was a splendid mansion facing the sea, with big, cheerful rooms, big bow windows and a sunny aspect, and furnished with luxury and taste—from the hall door to the garrets.

In this abode, with Persian carpets, mirrors, and silk and velvet hangings, poor Mrs. Meadows was completely at sea; her only occupation consisted in walking to and fro and discovering new wonders and dusting the furniture!

The servants could not make her out. Miss Darvall, now, she was a real lady; you could see it at a glance. But Mrs. Meadows—what was she? She said, "Sakes alive," and "deary me," and sauced her tea, and ate with her knife; yet Miss Darvall called her mother! Poor Mrs. Meadows did not puzzle the domestic for long, nor long enjoy her new surroundings.

Vanity was principally the cause of her end. She had purchased a magnificent silk and lace mantle, and longed to wear it. She foolishly left off her heavy seakskin, donned the new French cloak in spite of all Mary could urge, being a very headstrong old person. More than this, she sat out in an east wind on one of the benches on the Lees, where she caught a chill. Bronchitis succeeded, and in a week Mrs. Meadows was dead.

Mary was very sorry. She now felt herself utterly alone in the world, and although the old lady had occasionally been both trying and tyrannical, Mary was sincerely attached to her, and had the satisfaction of hearing from her dying lips that she had been "the best of daughters."

Mr. Montague came down to the funeral and followed the hearse in the same carriage as Mary, and stayed with her for the remainder of the day.

He was the only friend and adviser that she had. He told her that he had come to two conclusions. One was, that she must have a *chaperon*; and the other, that he thought he would come down and live at Folkestone for a while himself!

Both of these resolutions were very speedily carried out. He came almost immediately, and took lodgings not far from his "ward" as he called her, and spent a good portion of the day at "Bellevue," the name of her mansion. In a fur-lined coat and a bath chair he arrived, or in a neat little brougham with a high-stepping steed. He was not nearly so susceptible to the public eye as he had been formerly. Money, as he had once bitterly remarked, drew away attention from his deformity to his purse. He was as sharp-tongued as ever, and rated Mary as soundly as he used to do in the days when they did lessons together in the old shell-house.

"You can't go on living in this big house alone, you know?" he said; "and as to having Julia Darvall to live with you altogether, that's nonsense! You have done enough for her already. She's a good-natured, fine-looking young woman, but that's all. She is not a lady. I doubt very much if she's even a real Darvall, raised in the colony."

"She is as much as I am, and I won't have you say such things, Horace! Her step-mother is detestable, her father is odious, but she is my friend."

"And a rare good one she has found in you, not only in words but in pounds, shillings, and pence. However, to business. I think I've heard of a lady who will do for you as a *chaperon*. She is a distant connection of the Darvalls, on the mother's side, and not too well off, not young, and quite a gentlewoman. She is a widow."

"Oh, indeed! and what is her name?" inquired Mary, without any enthusiasm.

"Her name is Mrs. Clare. Her husband was an officer who died abroad. She has no children. I think you will find her everything that you require. She is old enough to *chaperon* you, and young enough to join in your pursuits. Has experience in the ways of the world; and, as far as I can judge from her letters, not merely tact, but brains!"

"I hope she is not too clever by half," thought Mary, but aloud,—

"I'm afraid she will find me but a dull companion. I don't suppose I have any tact, and you have often told me I had not much brains!"

"Merely to keep your conceit down. You have a good deal more than your share! Well, what am I to say to Mrs. Clare? Shall we take her on trial—say for three months? I had a letter from her this morning."

"Just as you please, Horace. I leave it all in your hands. You know what is proper better than I do!"

"Very well, my dear! I'll engage her on trial; say a hundred a-year, laundress and travelling expenses. Quite enough for doing nothing but sit at a most excellent table, live in a comfortable home, and drive about in a smart carriage with a very pretty girl."

"Of course you will tell her, or I must, all my antecedents, that I am ill-educated—that I have no friends."

"As much as it is necessary for her to know, my dear. Your bringing up, employment at Daneford, &c. There is nothing specially startling in your past."

"I think there is a great deal! My being reared and brought up by poor people as their own child, and my suddenly stepping into another station, and a large fortune—my scarcely knowing a soul but yourself."

"Yes; very true. That is all out of the common; and what about that little episode at St. James's, Caversham?"

"You mean my christening?"

"I do not! I mean your marriage!" he returned, sharply.

"How can you be so odious? Never—never mention it again."

"Not to Mrs. Clare?"

"Are you insane? Never to a single human being!"

"Oh! very well. As you please, my dear; but it will all come out some day in spite of you!" he returned, rising and stretching out his hand to take his leave. "However, you may depend on my silence, and much good it may do you."

Augusta Clare was a widow, as Humpy had said—a widow with a shallow purse and sharp wits. This invitation to act as *chaperon* to a young heiress, who had been brought up among plebeian surroundings, and who had received a very imperfect education, and never mixed in good society, seemed the very post for which she was borne!

She imagined that her charge would be an ignorant, uncouth rustic, who would look upon her as a marvellous being from another sphere, and who would allow her to take the reins of government entirely, and be as wax in her hands. She, Mrs. Clare, would be the real head of the house—dispense hospitality, patronage, and money.

As she travelled South, she lay back in her seat in the railway carriage, and indulged in a variety of very pleasant day-dreams, and built one or two very magnificent castles in the air!

Dreams and castles were alike dispelled by the appearance and style of the young lady who came to meet her. No country bumpkin this, who walked up to her with a firm, but graceful gait, dressed in a neat, tailor-made costume, and followed by an elderly man who was evidently deformed.

"I think you must be Mrs. Clare?" she said, holding out her hand. "We came down to meet you—this is Mr. Montagu."

Here Humpy took off his hat, and eyed his correspondent keenly.

She was not the least the type of woman he had expected—from her letters. She looked much younger than he anticipated, though probably, as he mentally remarked, her youthful appearance was due to Art.

She was extremely well, though plainly dressed. No trace of the poor companion about her garments, and she was remarkably handsome—teeth like porcelain, which she showed a good deal; jet black hair and eyes, and a brilliant complexion.

She was all radiant smiles and thanks and agreeability, but as she turned and addressed a few words to her future charge, he noted a hardness about her mouth, a subtle, searching glance in her eye, that made him ask himself

if he had done well to engage this lady on the strength of a distant kinship and a few clever letters, without that best test of all, a personal interview?

His heart sank within him as he thought that, for all his care and prudence, thanks to his own vanity and hatred of meeting strangers, he might have thrown his dearly-beloved ward and pupil into the arms of a crafty adventuress! These were his first fears.

A few honeyed words, and a few sunny smiles from Mrs. Clare, swept away all his suspicions, and he told himself, angrily, "that he had become so sceptical, and so suspicious, that he would doubt a saint from Heaven!"

Mrs. Clare proved to be a great success—a domestic and social success. She was delighted with everything and everybody, and had a way of administering the most delicate flattery to the whole household.

She praised Mary's air and looks, and voice and taste; she expressed immense reverence for Mr. Montagu's mind and talents, and his conversation she compared to Pope's, Sheridan's, and Sydney Smith's. She praised the maids, the footman, and the cook, and established herself in the good graces of almost the whole household.

The one exception was Miss Darvall, who, doing all in her power to like her companion and *chaperon*, never quite succeeded; and, in spite of Mrs. Clare's brilliant assaults, she never was able to take the citadel of her young friend's confidence—not though she drew spirited sketches of her own past life, and told her what she said was her own history from her cradle till now.

Related episodes of her family—a large one—all girls; of her married life; of her wicked relations who had robbed her, and of her husband who, she declared, worshipped the ground she walked on, and had not a secret in the world from her.

"That's the main thing, dearest" (to Mary), "mutual confidence. You and I must have complete confidence and trust in one another. No secrets. This is the surest basis of true friendship."

And then she would begin and gradually and artfully cross-examine her about her life, as she called it, "of low estate."

Clever little woman as she was, she divined that Mary held some secret in her past, and she used every effort her fertile brain could suggest to discover it. Once she knew it, she believed that she would establish an influence over her charge she was very far from now. Once she knew it, she would have her in her power.

She pumped the ladies' maid craftily—nothing to be got out of her. She questioned Mr. Montagu delicately about the dear child's bringing up. Had she any lovers? Any detrimental admirers of that rustic class? Had she ever had a *fancy* for anyone?

All these questions were cleverly put aside by her astute listener. She gained nothing whatever by cross-examining him, and made up her mind to trust entirely to her own clever wits, and to time, for the solution of a mystery that she was certain was concealed in Mary Darvall's past.

Although there were no confidences between the two ladies, they got on, outwardly, extremely well. Mrs. Clare undertook the housekeeping and servants, which left Miss Darvall at leisure to read and write, and to take lessons in music and French.

Owing to Mrs. Meadows's death, and also to her not knowing a soul in the place, Mary went nowhere save to church on Sundays, and for a drive or walk every afternoon.

This was a very dull life for Mrs. Clare, and by no means the career she had anticipated. What use were all her pretty toilettes—her smiles—her songs? They were just wasted on a cold, unresponsive companion, whose sole object in life seemed to be trying to what she called "improve her mind," and who pored over books, and scales, and exercises by the hour.

In the evenings, as they sat at work, they talked away fluently, and Mary had no hesitation in alluding to her early life—her foster-parents, her employment at Daneford, her friendship for Julia.

"Did you know no people besides those up at The Place?" inquired Mrs. Clare.

"One or two neighbours only. My foster-parents always kept themselves very much aloof."

"What a life for a young girl! No wonder you are so terribly grave and silent. You might be forty. You must turn over a new leaf, and enjoy your youth, Marie, my dear."

"I wish I could; but I don't know how."

"Go into society. Society will welcome you with open arms. You are Miss Darvall of Daneford, and that is sufficient introduction."

"But, even if I were to go out, I cannot dance or play tennis. I could only sit and look on. I should be a fish out of water."

"You will easily learn those accomplishments. If you shut yourself up from people they will think there is something the matter with you! Mr. Montagu, you know, is always urging you to mix with the world!"

"And how am I to begin? It is easier said than done!"

"Join the library, the tennis club, walk on the Lees instead of far out in the country. Be seen! Come with me to the band in the Pavilion Gardens this afternoon. I saw a friend of mine in church this morning—a Mrs. Seymour—a very nice woman, and quite a leader in society. If we meet I shall introduce you. She knows all the best people, and has a lovely place near Canterbury. Once you know her, getting into the swim is easy. Once launched, you will enjoy life. Now you vegetate!"

"But perhaps she won't care about knowing me!" said Mary.

"Oh, yes; she will be charmed. You are young, and rich, and you have a history." Mary's cheeks flamed. ("Aha!" said her *chaperon* to herself, "that shot told, though I fired in the air.") "She will be quite pleased to have you with her, and make much of you. She is not young, but likes to surround herself with young people, and think she is of the same standing. That's her one little weakness!" concluded Mrs. Clare, who had a good-natured way of saying ill-natured things.

Mary did not require much persuasion. She was getting tired of the sole companionship of Mrs. Clare and her books. She wanted something to stir the dull monotony of her life. And that same afternoon she found herself making the acquaintance of a very elegantly-dressed, lively, faded, fashionable woman, who made her sit beside her and talk to her, and with whom she was greatly amazed to find herself discoursing fluently and readily; also with the various people who belonged to Mrs. Seymour's party—two fair-haired girls, a trio of officers from Shorncliffe, and an elderly dandy, who sat a little aloof with Mrs. Clare, and whispered to her, and stared hard at Mary from beneath Mrs. Clare's big lace parasol.

On the whole, Mary enjoyed the change—the novelty, the interchange of chaff and small talk. After all, it was by no means difficult to hold her own in such society. Mrs. Clare was surprised to see her so animated, and to hear her laugh with hearty enjoyment at one of the young men's witticisms.

She was but lately one-and-twenty, and she was human, and only wanted society and amusement to be like other girls.

When the band was over the two parties took leave of one another, Mrs. Seymour promising to call next day, and telling her new acquaintance that, as she was staying in Folkestone, she must see a great deal of her.

After this Mary found herself almost unconsciously walking down the pier—a place she had scrupulously avoided all the time she had lived so close to it.

"What brought us on the pier?" she said,

suddenly interrupting an interesting account of Mrs. Seymour's life. "I"—stopping—"never knew we were here. I have been so intent upon listening to you!"

"A great compliment, my dear; but have you any special dislike to this part of the world? You have never been here before, to my knowledge!"

"No. Well, as we are so far, let us walk to the end." And once there, she turned her back on her companion and looked over into the sea for a long time in dead silence.

"You have some sentiment about this place, dearest!" said Mrs. Clare, insinuatingly.

"I have!" returned her charge, wheeling round almost fiercely, and winking away two tears. "A sentiment of shame. I treated someone very badly—here—on this spot. I—I"—choking down a lump in her throat—"treated—someone—abominably and ungratefully. I did not know it then. I know it now!"

Mrs. Clare walked home beside her charge in silence. Who was this "someone"—man or woman? No further details were to be drawn from her companion.

(To be continued.)

BOUND NOT TO MARRY.

—10:—

CHAPTER XVII.

A SECRET ENGAGEMENT.

"Do you really love me, Inez?" asks Charlie Rowe, as, for the twentieth time at least, he presses her hand to his lips, and clasps her waist more closely with his arm.

Her eyes meet his, and she smiles a happy trustful smile as she says,—

"Yes: it is strange, isn't it!"

"It may seem strange, but it is certainly very delightful!" he responds, emboldened to kiss her cheek, "though I am afraid Mrs. Darrell will not approve of me as a suitor; I am a poor man, Inez."

"Perhaps I have enough for both of us," she replies, with that desire to give all she possesses to the man she loves, so strong in the hearts of some women.

"That is the worst of it," he observes, slowly contracting his brows; "if you were no richer than I, people would not have it in their power to make ill-natured remarks."

She looks at his handsome sunburnt face in which his eyes appear pale and blue as a turquoise, and at the rich golden-brown pointed beard that had won her admiration the moment she first saw it, and she says gently and soothingly,—

"Let people say what they like about us:—if I don't care, you need not."

"My precious darling," he murmurs, and kisses her fondly.

Then, after a pause, his mind reverts to a more practical view of life, and he says thoughtfully.

"I am not quite a pauper, you know. My father left me a sum of money that would pay for the furnishing of a house, and I can make enough by painting and teaching to keep the wolf from our door, and if the world does not go very roughly with us, I may be able to give you a pony-carriage by and by."

"Oh! I am sure we shall get along very well indeed," she says hopefully, "and my money will help you to have a nice house and a big studio, where all the fashionable world will come to see you, and I shall be so proud to see people appreciate your talent."

"You sweet flatterer, I am afraid it will be a long while before the fashionable world will run after me," he answers tenderly, "and what troubles me now is the interview I must have with Mrs. Darrell before I leave you. I daresay she will turn me out of the house, and Hugh will cut me, when I tell them how we have spent this afternoon."

"Then don't tell them," is the prompt response. "I don't see why you should do so," she continues; "Mrs. Darrel is not my mother, nor is Hugh Darrel my brother, and it only wants three months to the time when I shall be of age, and my own mistress; can't we keep our engagement secret till then?"

"I don't like secrecy," returns Rowe dubiously. "Darrel might think it dishonourable on my part to come here as his guest, fall in love with his cousin and get her to secretly engage herself to me. It doesn't sound well. Now, does it?"

He is so perplexed, he looks so handsome, and he is so evidently intent upon doing the right thing to her and her friends as well as to himself, that she is touched by his strong desire to be straightforward, and she says slowly,—

"If you tell Mrs. Darrel she will shut me up and make my life a burden to me; so suppose we don't really engage ourselves for three months. We could not correspond, nor meet in the interval, except by practising secrecy, and if you will come to me on the tenth of January I shall be twenty-one, and my own mistress."

He sighed. Delays are dangerous. Nothing under the sun is so brittle as an engagement to marry; and now there was to be no engagement, but they were to go on living as though their present happiness had never been.

"You don't doubt me, do you?" she asks, observing the sigh and the silence that followed.

"No," he says, slowly and thoughtfully. "I don't doubt you; and if you change your mind in the interval, you have a perfect right to do so! Three months is a short probation, and we have only known each other three days."

"It seems to me as though we had known each other all our lives," she says gently; "and I don't think you will change in three months, will you?"

"No, my love, nor in three years," he answers, tenderly, "but I feel very sad at the thought of leaving you in this way."

"It is only for three months," she says hopefully, "and you will come to me on my birthday, won't you?"

"If I am alive I will," he replies, earnestly, "but, whether we are to consider ourselves engaged or not, give me one kiss, Inez, just one."

She blushes, hesitates, then yields to his entreaty. Their lips meet in a mutual kiss; but when they look up, their horror may be imagined at seeing the Rev. Theodore Makepeace looking sternly at them.

The next few seconds were almost as unpleasant to the curate as to the lovers.

He could neither advance nor retreat, and Rowe was equally puzzled what to do.

Inez was the first to regain something like self-possession, but even she could not meet the curate's angry and reproachful gaze; and she said in a low tone, to her lover,—

"Tell him we are engaged, but ask him to be silent about it. He is a gentleman, and will keep his word if he promises."

Then she rose quickly from the tree upon which they were sitting and hastened back to the house, leaving the two young men facing each other.

The task before Rowe was not a pleasant one. There were few things he would not rather have done than ask a favour of a man against whom he felt an unreasonable prejudice; but there was no help for it.

Mr. Makepeace must be silenced, or all the neighbourhood would soon be talking about the manner in which he had surprised them; so Rowe advanced to the stern and forbidding-looking clergyman and said, in as natural a tone as he could command,—

"You have surprised a secret, sir, which Miss Woodfall and I had wished to keep a little while; but when I ask you as a gentleman to respect it, I feel assured that you will do so."

"Did Miss Woodfall tell you to ask me to

be silent?" demanded the curate, ignoring Rowe's personality even more by his manner than by his words.

"Yes," she suggested that I should do so," was the reluctant reply.

"It is enough," was the brusque answer, and with the slightest possible inclination of the head, poor Mr. Makepeace turned on his heel and strode away, feeling utterly dejected and depressed.

For although the artist had not actually stated that he and Inez were engaged to be married, he had clearly implied it, and the young lady's manner and hasty retreat gave abundant confirmation to the fact.

When Rowe got back to the house he found that Mrs. Darrel had returned without her son.

What had become of the latter was not explained until later on; for the mistress of Witherleigh was not in an amiable mood, and she shut herself up in her own room, until dinner time.

She would probably not have appeared then but for the presence of her son's guest, in whom, personally, she had not the slightest interest.

Under these circumstances, dinner was rather a silent meal; and when Rowe followed the ladies to the drawing room he found Inez alone at the piano.

Mrs. Darrel did join them for a few minutes a little later, but she found them both seated at the instrument turning over sheets of music, looking for a duet which they wished to play; and the duet when found was so noisy, and Mr. Rowe seemed such a very harmless young fellow, that she yielded to her inclination to seek her own room again, where she could enjoy a certain amount of quiet, and where she was not obliged to appear amiable when she did not feel so.

For her son had annoyed her greatly on their way to Dorking; she had begun to talk in her old strain about Eleanor Rosevear, when Hugh stopped her by an emphatic assurance that she was quite mistaken in her estimate of the young lady, for he had met and spoken to her and had found that she was as good as she was beautiful.

"You have seen this creature, have you," demanded the angry lady in imperious tones.

"I have seen Miss Rosevear," he replied, contracting his brows, "and I admire her greatly."

"It's a pity that you are not going to marry her instead of this other girl," said Mrs. Darrel, watching his countenance with just the faintest suspicion of the truth.

But Hugh is prepared for the attack and he answers carelessly,—

"Yes, it is a pity."

Then, a few minutes later, as they reach the outskirts of the town he says,—

"I think I'll get down here; I have a lot to do, so I won't ask you to take me back with you, and don't wait dinner for me, mother, I shall be back in time to smoke a pipe with Rowe before we go to bed."

His mother offered no objection, and she drove on to the principal street in the town where she alighted and spent five minutes in a shop, but she made no calls, and this was the reason she was back so much sooner than Inez expected her.

That creature will yet come between Hugh and me, I am convinced," Mrs. Darrel muttered when she had shut herself in her own room. "It is strange how the very thought of her rouses a spirit of antagonism in my heart, and yet I never saw her and don't in the least know what she is like. This is a mistake on my part," she continues as she paces her room; "I ought to know what I have to fear. I ought to see her, and I will."

A little later, the half formed suspicion that had flashed upon her mind when in the carriage returned to her with increased strength, and she pondered anxiously, muttering,—

"Can it be possible? Can she be the woman he loves?"

"But no! Eleanor Rosevear gave up the estate out of fear, and not for love. The business would have been managed in a different way if she had loved him, or if he had loved her. The affliction of ever knowing that she is my son's wife will at least be spared me."

So she consoled herself, while Eleanor was hiding herself from Hugh; and he was growing impatient and irritable at not knowing where to find her.

Meanwhile, the lovers in the drawing room got on very well without either mother or son.

They played and sang and talked, and the time passed so quickly that they were startled almost to the extent of the betrayal of their secret by the return of Hugh Darrel, who came in while they were still seated at the piano.

Hugh's mind was very full of his own affairs, and yet he almost felt certain that Rowe's arm had been round his companion's waist the moment the door opened.

Whether it was so or not, the couple looked confused, and the girl just gave him a nod and went on playing—or rather began to play—while Rowe left her side, and turning to his friend, remarked,—

"So you have come back at last."

Hugh looked at the speaker steadily, but the light from the lamp was not full upon his face, and a moment's reflection convinced him that he must have been mistaken; and he answered carelessly, and with a yawn,—

"Yes, I am back at last. I suppose my mother has gone to bed?"

This question was addressed to Inez rather than to Rowe, and she answered, vaguely,—

"I don't know; she left the room while we were playing."

She turned from the piano as she spoke, glanced at her watch, and was almost frightened to see that the hands pointed to eleven; and with a hasty "good night," she went off to bed, leaving the two friends together.

"You and Inez seem to be great friends," remarked Hugh Darrel, when his cousin had left the room.

"Yes, I admire her greatly," was the outspoken reply; "she is an uncommonly jolly girl. I should have found the time hang heavily upon my hands since I have been here if it had not been for her; you and your mother have been so much occupied."

This was undoubtedly true; but for Inez Charlie Rowe would have been sadly neglected; and Hugh, while he secretly blamed his mother for leaving her ward so much with his friend, felt that some apology was due from himself, and he said,—

"Yes, I am afraid you have not been very well treated, old man; but, you see, my mother and I have been rather upset by family matters, and we don't agree on two or three subjects; she is as bitter against Eleanor as she ever was, and from something she said to-day, I believe she suspects the true state of affairs."

"How can she?" asked Rowe, assuming an interest he did not feel; "she has never spoken to me on the subject."

"Nor would she," said Hugh quickly; "she is too proud to seek such information from any one but myself."

"For my own part I don't see any reason for secrecy," remarked Rowe with a yawn; "you are of age, and your mother cannot forbid the banns. I certainly should make a clean breast of it if it were my case."

"I must make my confession to Eleanor first," replied Hugh, contracting his brows.

"I have heard her protest that nothing under the sun would induce her to marry Hugh Darrel, and I shall have to win her promise to marry me, be my name what it may, before I divulge it."

Rowe shrugged his shoulders. He was tired and sleepy. He had ceased to feel greatly interested in Miss Rosevear, and he had no liking whatever for Mrs. Darrel; he thought Inez worth a dozen of either of them, and though he could not express his opinion quite in this fashion, he said carelessly,—

"I don't think you are altogether to be envied, my dear fellow, despite your recent good fortune. Miss Rosevear is just the woman to resent the most pious fraud, and if Mrs. Darrel had lived in the good-old days she would have made a splendid Lady Macbeth; you'll have a jolly time of it between them. But I think I'll get to bed; I am sleepy."

Hugh made no answer except to say,—"Yes, it is late."

He did not like the tone of Rowe's remark, but there was nothing in it that he could resent, and he knew that there was a great deal of truth in what his friend said.

The excitement which he had naturally felt upon becoming the actual possessor of Darrel Court, was already giving place to the inevitable depression consequent upon great elation of spirits, and he already tormented himself with the dread that Eleanor had discovered that it was Hugh Darrel who had saved her life, and, prompted by gratitude and a desire to wipe out any obligation, had at once handed over the estate to him.

It was vain that he argued that she knew the property was really and legally his own; the suddenness of the settlement by the lawyers of the whole affair had in it something suspicious, and Mr. Morton's explanation, though plausible enough at the time, now struck him as most unsatisfactory, and he tormented himself as a man only can torment himself over an imaginary trouble.

He slept little that night, and the next morning his appearance fully justified Rowe's remark—that good fortune did not seem to agree with him.

The two gentlemen were to start for Cornwall almost immediately after breakfast, and Rowe and Inez had some difficulty in snatching a few brief moments together in which to say good-bye.

"I suppose I must not write to you?" asked the artist ruefully, as he held her in his arms.

"It will be better not to do so," she replied cheerfully, "and we have only three months to wait; you will come to me on the 10th of January, won't you?"

"If I am in the land of the living, I shall be with you," he replied earnestly.

The sound of approaching footsteps warned them that they must part, and after a hurried embrace Inez gives her lover a red rose, which she had worn at her throat at breakfast, and he had only time to thrust the flower into his breast pocket before Mrs. Darrel and her son joined them.

It is strange how enlightenment comes to us when we are least prepared and least anxious to receive it.

Mrs. Darrel had not troubled herself in the least about her ward and her son's friend, and Hugh had not made any remark on the subject to her; but when she now met them together on the eve of parting, something in their faces warned her of a new danger—a new trouble—the possibility of another rebel against her authority.

She missed the rose which Inez had worn at breakfast, and guessing its destination, she asked the girl pointedly if she had lost it.

"No, I took it out," replied Inez, steadily; and Mrs. Darrel asked no more.

She felt that it was quite possible if she did so her ward would tell her what she had done with the flower, and at the present moment she was not equal to the emergency that might thus be created.

This was Mr. Rowe's first visit to Witherleigh, and the mistress of the house mentally vowed that it should be his last.

He and Inez might have got up a sentimental flirtation—probably they had done so—but nothing should come of it, the girl's guardian quite resolved; and since Hugh had made it clear to everybody that he did not intend to marry his cousin, Mrs. Darrel mentally disposed of her ward in another quarter.

Whether or not she will be successful in

carrying out her intention, time only can show.

Meanwhile, Hugh Darrel and his friend are on their way to Darrel Court, where news of their intended arrival has preceded them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE COUNT ACCEPTS HIS CONGÉ.

THE day following Mr. Morton's last-recorded visit to Miss Rosevear, the Count di Talmino again called upon the young lady, and again was answered, "Not at home."

On the succeeding morning a letter arrived from him, couched in the most passionate language, and breathing a tale of eternal devotion; but this brought no reply, and again and again he called, with the same disappointing result.

Eleanor, meanwhile, was virtually a prisoner in her own house, for she felt very certain that the count haunted the neighbourhood, and she was sure that she could not go out except with a very good chance of meeting him.

This kind of thing could not last an indefinite length of time.

When a couple of weeks had gone by, Mrs. Pritchard became impatient and Eleanor irritable, and both of them felt that sooner or later a determined stand must be made against this importunate foreigner.

"We really ought to go out for a walk or a drive," remarked Mrs. Pritchard one afternoon, when this kind of thing had been going on as long as she could bear it; "we don't only want fresh air, because, as you have truly said, we can get that in the garden, but we want exercise; and though it is now the end of November, the air is so crisp and fresh that I feel I could walk any distance."

"Yes, I should greatly enjoy a walk," assented Eleanor, "but I don't want to meet the count. I shall have a dreadful scene with him when we do meet."

"I wish Mr. Hughes were living near here," was the companion's next remark; "we should feel that we had some one to protect us!"

Eleanor laughed to hide her blushes, then she said,—

"I am afraid his presence would not improve matters, for the Count and he might quarrel and that would be very unpleasant."

"I don't think anything could be more unpleasant than the present state of mingled terror and indignation in which we live," returned Mrs. Pritchard, with energy. "Mitcham tells me that this house is watched day and night; it is as bad as though we were a set of forgers!"

"If this kind of thing continues, I shall have to appeal to the police for protection!" exclaimed Eleanor, indignantly. "To be watched is intolerable!"

"May I tell the Count so the next time he comes," asked Mrs. Pritchard, promptly.

"Yes, I shall be glad if you will," replied Eleanor; "his conduct is most unwarrantable, and I will no longer endure it!"

While they were thus talking, the Count di Talmino's knock sounded at the front door, and Mrs. Pritchard rang a bell and told the servant to show him into the library.

A few minutes elapsed, and then, without asking for instructions from Eleanor, the companion went to the room in which the Italian was impatiently waiting.

His handsome face changed when he saw who it was that had come to speak with him, and he was scarcely courteous enough to utter the briefest words of greeting before he said, haughtily,—

"It is not you, it is Miss Rosevear with whom I will speak."

"Miss Rosevear declines to see you, Count," said the lady, taking her seat at the table and looking at him with a calm, steady gaze, which he felt to be very annoying.

"Why will she not see me?" he demanded.

"She declines to give a reason," is the

quietly uttered response; "but you must have known that she did not desire to see you by the number of times you have been told she was not at home."

"And that was a fiction," he retorted feeling tempted to use a much stronger word.

"A polite fiction," she responded, with a smile, "and you of all men must have understood that. But it is useless to mince matters, Count di Talmino; Miss Rosevear has surrendered part of her fortune; she is no longer the wealthy woman she was, and she has made up her mind to avoid, or in other words, to cut off all her old acquaintances."

"The 'all' does not include her artistic friends, I presume?" he sneered.

"I believe it does," she answered calmly; "but it certainly includes you, my lord."

"But I will not be cut off as you call it. I have made a proposal to Miss Rosevear, and she has not written to me in answer!"

"You have made the same proposal many times, and have always had one answer, I believe," said the lady coldly.

"And if I have, shall I not ask again?" he demanded, in a tone so tragic that she can barely repress a smile.

"As the answer would be the same, Miss Rosevear is probably tired of writing it," she retorts quietly.

Then, after a pause, she says slowly and in a very quiet and resolute manner,—

"Miss Rosevear and I would be very sorry to hurt your feelings, or to expose you to ridicule, count; but it is impossible for us to submit to be persecuted, either by you personally or by the spies whom you employ to watch this house, and unless this condition of things at once ceases we shall appeal for protection to the police!"

His face becomes pale with passion. He has a much greater aversion to, and fear of, the police than is natural to an Englishman; and the threat, uttered politely as it is, shows him in colours too plain to be misunderstood—that Eleanor Rosevear has firmly resolved now and for ever to reject his suit.

This conviction gives him a shock, though he had almost anticipated it.

If he could go away and bear his pain silently, the world at large, and he himself after a time, would be no worse for it.

But such violent love as his does not die a natural death, and the faintest spark of jealousy will make it a ruthless and unsparring agent of destruction.

"I owe this to that artist fellow with the two names," he says, and his face becomes distorted with jealous rage.

"To whom do you allude?" asks the lady, in genuine surprise.

"To whom? You do not know? To the man who saved her life as you all say, though I doubt not she could have saved herself. He will pay dearly for it if she has disarmed me, for him."

"Your temper clouds your judgment, count," says Mrs. Pritchard, rising and looking at him coldly; "Mr. Hughes has not been inside this house, and Miss Rosevear has neither seen nor heard from him since we left Dovercourt. But you seem to forget, Count di Talmino, that an English lady has a right to choose her own friends, and that she is not to be compelled to marry any man who may like to ask her. Had you been satisfied with her first intimation, that Miss Rosevear would not marry you, we might both have been spared this unpleasant interview!"

"Enough!" exclaims the Count, likewise rising. "I go! I am dismissed! I accept my congé, but let him look to himself who is more successful than I. I will wish you good morning, madam."

He went, and Mrs. Pritchard followed him into the hall, but he had closed the house-door behind him before any servant could come to do so.

It was in no comfortable frame of mind that the lady went back to the drawing-room to report the result of this interview to Eleanor.

She did not detail all that was said, but she

repeated the Count's statement that he accepted his *compé*, and likewise his threat against a more successful rival.

"Of whom is he jealous?" asked Eleanor, carelessly.

"He mentioned, or rather alluded to, Mr. Hughes," was the answer; "but I assured him that you had not seen that gentleman since you left Dovercourt."

"And that satisfied him?" was the next question.

"No; nothing satisfied him, and he has gone away furious; but he won't annoy you any more, and now shall we go for a good brisk walk?"

Eleanor assented, and soon afterwards the two ladies were walking at a rapid pace in the direction of Hampstead Heath.

Although it was the end of November, the weather was exceptionally fine and bright, with just that suspicion of frost in the air which to a healthy temperament is so exhilarating.

The trees had not completely lost their leaves, and some of the rich glowing tints of autumn lingered on the landscape, while upon the heath the gorse was still in bloom.

"This is delightful!" exclaims Mrs. Pritchard, as she stands on the broad walk, within view of the windows of Jack Straw's Castle, and looks for awhile in the direction of Highgate, the church being the highest object in the landscape, and then turns and directs her gaze towards Finchley and Harrow.

"Yes," replies Eleanor, sharing the enthusiasm of her companion; "it is not so grand as mountain scenery, but I think I like it better."

They are an elegant-looking couple as they stand here side by side.

Mrs. Pritchard is the most richly dressed of the two, her dolman of rich brown plush suiting her well.

Eleanor wears a cloth dress and short tight-fitting jacket of dark green, trimmed with astrachan, the making of which had cost much more than the material; but it fits her exquisitely, showing her small, supple waist, and her well-developed bust and shoulders.

The glitter of her bright hair is caught by the departing sunlight, and attracts the attention of the few passers-by; but it is not by any of these she is recognized.

On the steps of the hotel known as Jack Straw's Castle two gentlemen happen to be standing as Miss Rosevear and her companion pass on the opposite side of the road in the direction of the "Spaniards," and one of these two instantly recognizes them, and utters a low exclamation of surprise as he does so.

"What is the matter?" asks his companion, a small, dark man, with long, curling hair, a soft, wide-brimmed hat, and a general get-up suggestive of either an artist or an organ-grinder.

The question is addressed to Charlie Rowe, whose stay in Cornwall was not a long one, and who has now been living in London for the last three weeks.

"Nothing—that is, nothing of consequence," is the answer; then, after a moment's reflection, he adds,—

"I happen to know those two ladies who are walking along there. I thought they were abroad. I wonder where they are living!"

"If you know them well, why not go and ask them?" suggests Lionel Watts, languidly.

"One of them is rather handsome."

"No, I shan't speak to them," says Rowe, slowly and thoughtfully. "They are friends of a friend of mine, and I should like to find their address for his sake. They can't be living far from here. I wonder what I had better do."

"Can't make a suggestion," replies Watts; "but I'll go back to town without you if you wish it."

Rowe reflects for a few minutes, then he says, frankly,—

"I wish you would; I must not lose sight of them. It will be the greatest kindness I can do my friend to send him their address."

"All right, old man, I understand," says Watts, with a nod of the head. "I shall see you some time to-morrow."

And he goes off to town, fully believing the friend in this case to be a fiction.

It is not difficult for Rowe to keep the two ladies in sight, for before they reach the further end of the broad walk they turn, and begin to walk quickly homeward.

The winter sun is setting. A cold wind sweeps along the high ground, and the mists rise from the valley, so that Eleanor and Mrs. Pritchard are not sorry to get to Froggnal, where they will find more shelter than on the open Heath, and then they quickly reach their own house, which seems particularly cosy and inviting.

That evening's post brought Eleanor a letter from Cornwall.

It had been sent first to Mr. Merton's office, and had then been forwarded on by him.

At her first glance at the envelope she wondered who her correspondent could be; then she remembered the writing as that of Miss Trefusis, an aunt of Florry's, through whom, indeed, she had first known the girl-artist.

Miss Trefusis lived on the Darrel Court estate, in a small, pretty house, for which she had paid the late Miss Darrel a merely nominal rent, and when the property passed into Eleanor's hands she had directed the steward to remit the rent altogether.

With so many other matters to trouble and confuse her, Eleanor had forgotten old Miss Trefusis, and the difference which a change of owners of the place in which she lived might make to the old lady, whose income could not exceed thirty or forty pounds a year.

"Poor thing! I suppose she is in trouble, and wants me to help her," thought Eleanor, as she unfolded the letter and began to read.

She had not read many lines when she found that she had been mistaken.

Her correspondent said nothing about her cottage, nor of the rent to be paid for it. The first part of the letter was one of unqualified praise of Mr. Darrel, the new owner of the Court, who, according to the writer, was liked and admired by everyone.

"He called to see me last week," said the garrulous correspondent, "and he was so nice you could not believe, my dear, almost as charming as yourself, and quite as considerate as my dear friend his aunt, who has been taken from us. And who do you think he talked about, my dear? Why, yourself. He seemed to know a great deal about you, and he said he had seen you and admired you greatly; and then he asked me if I knew where you were, and I said no, but could easily find out. And then he said that he wished that I would, because he had something very particular to tell you. Oh, he is so handsome, my dear, and such a gentleman, and so nice in every way. And if you could only see things together in the same light! But there, Shakespeare, I think it was, said that marriages were made in Heaven, so I'll say no more on that subject."

Eleanor paused. She was both angry and pleased with what she had read.

But she told herself, with some impatience, that Hugh Darrel was not, and never could be, anything to her. If there was one man to whom she could ever be tempted to give herself, it certainly was not to him.

Then she tried to dismiss the subject from her mind, and finish reading her letter.

"I am very much troubled," Miss Trefusis wrote, "about my niece Florence, to whom you have been so kind. From all I can hear, she is behaving in a most extraordinary manner. Of course my brother has acted very foolishly in marrying a second wife, but his daughter is not the person to punish him for taking such a step; and if half that I hear is true, Florry has made the newly-married couple as miserable as it was possible to make them. My brother has written to ask me to invite his daughter to come and live with me, but she refuses to do so. She says that her father must make her an allowance; then she

will go to London and study in the schools, and work until she can be independent of him. It seems a dreadful thing for a young girl to contemplate such a step, but I believe she will succeed in driving them to consent, if only to get rid of her."

Then the writer went back to what more nearly concerned her—the changes that were being made at Darrel Court—and ended by a request that Eleanor would send her address, so that it might be given to Mr. Darrel.

This letter disturbed Eleanor. She thought she had done with Hugh Darrel, and now he cropped up again in her life.

What really startled her was the assertion that he had seen her, and she wondered where and how; but no suspicion of the real truth entered her mind.

To send her address to Miss Trefusis to give to him, would be like an invitation for him to come, and this she would not do.

She did not want to see him; no power under Heaven, she vowed, should make her marry him; she could never forget the insults that his mother had poured upon her; and she had no heart left for him to win.

But, oh! how solitary she was. How her heart hungered and thirsted for the presence of one dear face; for the sound of one melody that was sweeter to her ears than any melody!

She had hidden herself from him; she had said in her heart she would never meet again, and yet in her secret soul she had believed that he would find her, and would compel her, spite of herself, to yield to his love.

But he came not, and the weeks that had elapsed since they parted seemed to her weary heart like so many years.

So she did not answer Miss Trefusis's letter, and greatly to Mrs. Pritchard's chagrin she began to take long solitary walks, in which her companion was not invited to join her.

In truth, our heroine was in that nervous expectant frame of mind in which the small talk of another person is of all things the most trying; and though it was certainly too late in the year to sit about and read either with comfort or safety, Eleanor felt a sort of protection and companionship in the book which she usually carried with her.

One morning early in December she left home saying she should be back in time for luncheon, and started for the west side of the Heath, where she thought she could find a sheltered corner in which to read and dream.

No thought of danger crossed her mind as she walked out of her own gate for this the last of her solitary rambles.

(To be continued.)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES NEAR WORMS.—Some excavations lately carried out at Flonheim, near Worms, have brought to light some most interesting specimens of Frankish antiquity. In and around the old Romano-Gothic church, Franco-Gothic chiefs and nobles had their burial places. The new church does not stand on exactly the same ground as the old one, and so it was possible to undertake explorations that would otherwise have been difficult. In one grave a necklace of fine pearls was found around the neck of a female skeleton, with small gold plates, adorned with filigree work inserted as pendants between each pair of pearls. There was some heavily gilt silver ornaments, with filigree work, lying on the breast; beside the skeleton a piece of yellow topaz, a silver buckle, and a comb of bone. In another woman's grave there were similar ornaments, and also some pieces of glass (unusual in Frankish graves), and keys of a form hitherto unknown in Germany. In a man's grave there were found a gold ring of exquisite workmanship, which could have belonged only to a woman, a pot of singular shape, arrows, a shield, a heavy javelin, a sword, a drinking-cup, a beautiful buckle of gilt bronze, and a piece of a chain of twisted wire.

HAPPY HOMES.—How careful should mothers be to make their homes sunny, joyous, bright and attractive, for on them is built the great fabric of the years to come. The long chain of life-experience and lifetime memories begins there, and thought retravels the path so often, lingering here and there by the way, living over and over again the sunny spring-time memories. Mothers, too, should instill into every member of their families not only a love for truth, honour and virtue, but also a love for temperance, correct living, and all the health commandments which are needful to a healthful life.

HONEY AS A FOOD.—A correspondent who evidently has a "sweet tooth" sends up the following regarding honey as a food: It is a common expression that honey is a luxury, having nothing to do with the life giving principle. This is an error—honey is food in one of its most concentrated forms. True it does not add so much to the growth of muscles as does beefsteak, but it does impart other properties no less necessary to health, and vigorous physical and intellectual action. It gives warmth to the system, arouses nervous energy, and gives vigour to all the vital functions. To the labourer it gives strength—to the business man, mental force. Its effects are not like ordinary stimulants, such as spirits, &c., but it produces a healthy action, the results of which are pleasing and permanent—a sweet disposition and a bright intellect. Thousands and tens of thousands of children are dying all around us, who, because their over-developing nature demands sweetness, crave and eagerly demolish the adulterated "sweets" and "syrups" of modern times. If these could be fed on honey instead, they would develop and grow up into healthy men and women. Children would rather eat bread and honey than bread and butter; one pound of honey will go as far as two pounds of butter, and has, besides, the advantage of being far more healthy and pleasant-tasted, and always remains good, while butter soon becomes rancid, and often produces cramp in the stomach, eructations, sourness, vomiting and diarrhoea. Pure honey should always be freely used in every family. Honey eaten upon wheat bread is very beneficial to health.

St. Petersburg.—As approached from the Neva, St. Petersburg presents a most imposing aggregate of gilded domes, tall spires, and immense palaces, and other public buildings. All is vast, and arranged on a plan so gigantic that even the loftiest buildings seem dwarfed. The immense edifices side by side become monotonous for want of grouping and variety. The most important part of the city is the southern portion. Here are the principal buildings and finest streets. The Court, the nobility, and half the population reside there. This district is divided into three parts by canals, which are crossed by the three principal streets in St. Petersburg, radiating from the Admiralty—namely, the Neva Perspective, the Peas Street, and the Ascension Perspective. The first of these is the Regent Street of the Russian capital, as regards life and fashion; it is one hundred and fifty feet wide, and is lined on each side with elegant shops, palaces, and churches. All these three main avenues run straight through the city, like the spokes of a wheel, through the sumptuous aristocratic quarter, the commercial regions, and the outskirts inhabited by the poor; the long vistas terminating in the mists that rise from the swamps outside. Many broad streets, lined with rows of broad mansions, are perfectly still except for the passage of an occasional *drojki*. In the more crowded streets the predominance of the military element is very striking. The ordinary garrison of the capital is sixty thousand men, and soldiers of various types—Tartars, Circassians, Cossacks—are constantly met with. But beside the soldiers, the police officers, university professors, public school teachers, and pupils, all wear uniform; in fact, half the moving population bear a military aspect.

SISTER MARY.

—O—

I.
Tom and Harry, and Charlie and Jim,
Have each their favourite cousin;
And if one listened to brother Jack,
He has sweethearts by the dozen.
But I have loved from my boyhood up,
With a love that naught can vary,
The best little girl in all the world—
My dear, pretty sister Mary.

II.
For Mary is always up to mark,
Whatever you want her to do;
She mends my nets, and makes my balls,
And the flags for my pet canoe;
She copies my songs, she writes my notes,
And never has called me debtor;
For if I give her a kiss and a smile,
There's nothing that she likes better.

III.
If you take a sweetheart for a walk,
She will wear a hat and feather,
A stylish dress and a stylish cloak,
And nothing that stands the weather.
But Mary will carry my fishing reel,
In a sensible dress and bonnet;
A sister's the girl for a real good time,
And you may rely upon it.

IV.
And you never can trust a sweetheart,
She is oftener cross than kind;
And how can you hope to please her,
When she seldom knows her mind?
But whether things go like a pleasure trip,
Or whether they go contrary,
I'm sure of the same true sympathy
From my little sister Mary.

V.
Sweethearts will play with a fellow's love;
They can give you lots of sorrow;
But Mary's good as gold to-day,
And as good as gold to-morrow.
She went away for a week one time,
And, oh! how my sad heart miss'd her!
I wouldn't take dozens of sweethearts
For my dear little jolly sister.

M. B. C.

A SECRET SIN.

—O—

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN honour of Sir Roger's birthday, Pera decorated the dinner-table with roses from the garden, and Thomas brought the old family plate out of ancient cupboards, where the Earl of Leicester in the olden days kept the goblets, out of which he used to pledge his queen.

Lights were placed in the old-fashioned branch candlesticks, which lit up the beautiful alabaster mantelpiece, and showed off to advantage the delicate carving of the cedar wood panels.

Sir Roger's white head looked well at the bottom of the table—his fine aristocratic face was more animated than usual, and some of their former brightness had come back to his thoughtful grey eyes.

At the side sat Bernard Vansittart, his black hair tumbling over his forehead till it nearly touched his level brows, his dark, keen face betraying a suppressed excitement which he was doing his best to control.

Every now and then he raised his eyes and shot a swift glance from under his thick lashes at his cousin—a glance in which all the fire and the passion of his restless heart were revealed—but only for an instant.

The next moment it would seem as if he had drawn an iron mask over his face, and had no more interest in what was passing around him than a statue.

To Pera sitting there, doing the honours of the table so sweetly, in her position as the young mistress of the house, and adding a large quota of beauty and grace to the festival, it seemed as if the dinner would never end. She kept straining her ears for any sound outside, and once, when there was a footstep on the gravel, she started so violently as to attract her father's attention.

"Child, how nervous you are!" he exclaimed, as he put down the glass which he had just emptied. "I thought you left nerves and such nonsense to fine ladies of your aunt's stamp. We don't want them here!"

"Warburton has done Pera no good," said Bernard, suddenly; "she was a girl when she went—a happy, careless girl, without an anxiety in the world beyond a temporary illness amongst her pets."

"And pray am I an old woman now?" looking up at him with a gleam of her old sauciness.

"No!" letting his eyes rest on her with such an odd expression in them that she could not help an involuntary shiver. "Not old with toothless gums, and joints stiff with rheumatism; but you are a woman—a second Eve. You've tasted the tree of knowledge, and it will be years before you get the bitterness out of your mouth. You should go to a land where there are no flirtations; no non-sensical garden parties; no flaunting about in furbelows and satins; no eternal rushing to and fro into other people's houses for gossip and scandal. These are the things that bring hatred and fury into families, that destroy peace, that kill sleep, that haunt the mind with horrors. The only way is to cut and run, and that at once. I start next Wednesday. I only wish it were to night!"

"My dear Bernard, how excitable you grow!" and Sir Roger contemplated his nephew gravely. "Quiet in moderation is good for girls, and I can't see that it has done Pera any harm!"

"No harm!" striking the table with his fist. "Good Heavens! Is everyone blind but me?"

"Don't talk trash! If you've got a crank in your head about Australia, by all means go! You'll find human nature the same there as here, and in six months' time you'll be coming back with a colonial wife!"

Bernard started to his feet.

"Pera!" he said, imperiously. "You know better than that."

"Why do you appeal to me?" looking up into his agitated face with serious eyes. "I know nothing about you. Sit down, and have a plum," pushing the dessert-dish towards him.

He took the plum she offered, and, as if such a trivial action had brought him back from his wild flights to the realities of life, he sat down and began quietly to eat it.

"Would you mind telling me what you propose to do out there?" asked Sir Roger, after a pause. "When you have given up your profession—"

"I have not given it up. I shall practise at the bar at Sydney."

"Have you any opening?"

"Not as yet, but I shall make one."

"Then you haven't turned your back on civilisation altogether?" said Pera, with a smile. "I thought you were going to live up in the wilds on a sheep-run, without a coat to your back, or a woman within fifty miles?"

Before he could answer Thomas opened the door, and announced that Mrs. Mitford wished to see Mr. Vansittart on urgent business. Sir Roger looked surprised, whilst the blood rushed into Vansittart's face, and then retreated, leaving it very pale. Pera felt her heart beat fast, but tried to look unconscious, as she broke up a biscuit.

"Tell her I can't see her. I'm at dinner!" said Bernard, quickly.

"Who is it? I don't understand women coming after you here," and his uncle frowned. "I've got nothing to do with her. I don't ask her to come," excitedly.—"Stop a bit,

Thomas; perhaps I had better go, and tell her never to come again."

"This is the second time."
"It shall be the last, I promise you," and he hurried out of the room, having laid the strongest emphasis on the last words.

Pera looked after him with a sudden anxiety in her eyes. How could he tell that it would be the last time? What measures would he be likely to take to insure it? Certainly nothing out of the way, whilst he was in his uncle's house.

She was growing quite ridiculous, she told herself, as she linked her arm within her father's, and went with him into the drawing-rooms. She wheeled his usual high-backed armchair forward, gave him the paper, and took a few steps towards the door.

"Don't run away just yet!" he said, to her surprise. "It's ages since I've heard you touch the piano. Give me one of the songs I used to be fond of."

At any other time she would have been delighted to have him ask her to sing, but not this evening, when she felt her presence might be urgently needed by Lucy, and Captain Valentine would be sure to be wondering where she was.

Still she could not refuse her father, so she sat down at once and sang "Auld Robin Gray," which was the first that came into her head. As she played the last chords she heard a sound, and crashed down her fingertips on the wrong notes.

Sir Roger winced, but she was so pre-occupied that instead of expressing contrition she only asked, "What was that?"

"A fearful discord," he answered, irritably. "High time that you should take up your music again, for you've quite forgotten it."

"But that noise outside?" straining her ears to listen, and evidently perfectly unconscious of his reproach.

"One of your peabens disagreeing with her mate. Really, child, the veriest cockney might have guessed what it was. Did you hear what I said about your playing?" a slight peevishness still in his tone.

"Did I play wrong notes?"

"Did you? Good heavens! Why, they were enough to make my teeth ache for a year."

"Then I won't play another note till I've practised thoroughly," springing up from the music stool. "I think I will go into the garden for a breath of air."

"Where are Bernard and his young woman? Take care not to run against them. I know nothing about her, and she mayn't be fit for you to meet."

"I'll ask Thomas," and so she escaped from the room, her heart smiting her as she left her father alone on his birthday.

But what was to be done? The old butler was in the dining room clearing away the remains of the dessert. She asked him where Mr. Vansittart was.

"Gone up to the ruins, miss, taking the young lady with him."

"To the ruins!" she exclaimed in amazement; and then a sudden fright seizing her, she sped through the hall and stood out on the gravel, listening and waiting she scarcely knew for what.

There was not a sound to be heard except the ordinary noises from the stable-yard, the growl of a dog, the clatter of a pail, the flutter of a peacock's tail, the neigh of a horse.

She went past the holly-hedge over the lawn to the low wall beyond, and peeped into the yard. Captain Valentine was nowhere to be seen.

She came back and went slowly up the path to the postern which led to the precincts of the Castle. She felt that she would not be keeping her word to Mrs. Mitford unless she followed her, and yet she was afraid of doing so, lest she should miss Captain Valentine.

As the whole affair was to be kept secret, it would not do to leave a message with Thomas, whose grey head was even now visible in the porch.

She opened the gate, and shutting it behind her looked cautiously round. Somebody instantly came towards her from behind a thick holly-bush; but the shadows were so dark, and the light was beginning to fail, so she could not see distinctly who it was.

Presuming it was Captain Valentine, she held out her hand, which was eagerly clasped in another. By that very clasp, so soon loosened, she knew who it was even before he spoke. Oh! how her foolish heart was throbbing as Bertie Vyvyan said, apologetically,—

"Val was detained—he couldn't come for half-an-hour—so sent me instead. You don't mind, do you?" looking into her sweet face with eyes that had hungered for a sight of it.

She did not answer. A big lamp was in her throat—tears gathered in her eyes—tears that she would have given ten years of her life to be able to dry unseen.

That silence tried him more than anything. He fancied he had offended her so mortally that she never would speak to him again, and was half beside himself at the thought. He came a little nearer.

"Don't misjudge me. Don't imagine I am happy. I'm the most miserable man alive. Pera, look at me once—for the last time!"

There was such a passion of entreaty in his voice that she without yielded, then turned away to hide the tears which were falling fast.

One tear fell down the rounded cheek and on to her dress, betraying her. It was more than he could stand. He caught her hands, and bent over her, his chest heaving—the one passionate love of his heart drawing him on, whilst honour—that honour which had never failed—held him back.

"Oh, my love; my love!" he groined, kisses trembling on his lips, as his face seemed to be drawn against his better self nearer to hers, so near that she could feel his breath upon her downcast lashes.

It was a moment of temptation to both—to both in their weakness—but neither yielded. For when resistance was growing impossible, when one heart seemed to be leaping to meet the other, and resolutions were breaking like straws, a sudden scream ringing out upon the evening air startled them both to the prose of life.

They started apart, and looked wildly round as if uncertain where it came from. Then, as the real position of affairs broke upon Pera, she rushed towards Cesar's Tower in an agony of fear and penitence.

She had been so selfishly engrossed with her lost lover, whilst something terrible must have happened to Lucy, whom she had promised to protect. Spurred on by remorse she flew across the grass with Vyvyan by her side, he moderating his steps to hers, because she seemed to know which direction to take. Instinct was leading her to the very spot where she saw her cousin standing on the night of the third of June.

CHAPTER XXXII.

As they rounded the corner of the high walls, which form the ancient Keep, Bernard sprang down a flight of ruined steps, and tried to rush past them. Pera seized hold of his coat-sleeve, and compelled him to stop.

"Where's Mrs. Mitford?" she asked, breathlessly.

"He had no hat on his head. In the twilight his face looked grey, his hair ruffled. The bow of his white tie was undone, and his shirt-front was crumpled, as if it had suffered rough usage."

His eyes looked scared, and wandered right and left, never meeting those which were fixed on him.

"What do you want her for?" he asked, hoarsely.

"I want to see her. I want to know if you've told her where to find her husband!" said Pera, boldly, though her heart was flutter-

Bernard peered over her shoulder.

"Who's that?"

"Vyvyan!" said Bertie, stepping forward. "I am as much interested as Miss Clifford in your answer," drawing himself up, and looking defiantly into Vansittart's face, as if to tell him that the hour for evasions was over.

A flash of vindictive hatred shot from Bernard's dark eyes, but he controlled himself suddenly as he turned to Pera, and spoke in a softer tone,—

"Go home, child, leave him with me! He and I together will settle this matter between us!"

As he spoke the fingers of his right hand twitched convulsively, as if he were clutching at something in the air. There was something so vicious in the movement that a new fear seized Pera, and she moved a step nearer to Bertie as if to protect him.

"I am not going till you've told me where Mrs. Mitford is," she said, resolutely.

"No more am I," added Vyvyan.

Bernard bent his head on one side as if listening—listening to what? Then in a half-whisper he said,—

"She's gone two hours ago. I sent her to her husband."

"It is not more than half-an-hour since she came. I know she's here, and I mean to find her," and with a sudden spring she went past him up the steps. He dashed after her, and got in front of her, his chest heaving with long-drawn breaths.

"You shan't come here! Stop her, Vyvyan!" in great excitement; "it is dark as hell. She'll fall—she'll die!"

"Stay here," said Vyvyan, in a low voice; "and leave me to search every nook and corner."

"Yes; leave him," hurriedly, in a whisper; "whilst you go home," trying to push her down the steps. "Go home to your old father, darling! go home."

She shook off his hands, and looked him straight in the face.

"If there were no one to hear you wouldn't whisper. She is here, and I mean to see her."

She tried to pass him again, but he clutched her by the shoulder, and hissed in her ear,—

"I've sent her to her husband. If Vyvyan wants to go after him, I'll send him at once."

"I do. Only tell me where he is, and I'll start directly."

A ghastly smile crossed Vansittart's face.

"You've asked me, Pera, bear witness that he has asked me. He wants to see Graves and his little wife. They are both together, and he shall join them."

"I want to see them," too. "Let me."

"No, no, Pera!" still in a whisper. "Go home. Say good-bye to the old man for you and me, then we'll go together and place the wens between ourselves and Lillingworth, never to come back—never! Ha! what are you after?" springing up the steps as Vyvyan disappeared round the corner.

Bertie had reached the open mouth of the dungeon, and was bending over it, listening to a sound which seemed to catch his ear from down below. As he stooped forward Vansittart sprang upon him with the force of a tiger.

He was within an ace of losing his balance, but caught tight hold of his enemy to save himself. There was a fearful struggle between the two, as, locked in each other's arms in a clasp of deadly hatred, they wavered and rocked by the edge of that hollow grave.

With a wild scream which was caught up by one echo after another, Pera rushed to separate them; but what could she do against a strong man like her cousin excited to frenzy? Vyvyan was no match for him, for though strong and active by nature, his muscles were weakened by his illness, and the supernatural strength supplied by frenzy was wanting.

Ever nearer and nearer Vansittart dragged him to the dungeon's mouth, forcing him downwards against the floor, and trying to beat his head against the stone coping. It was a moment of supreme agony for the unfortunate girl, who uttered a scream after

scream, as she clung desperately to her cousin's arm.

"Bernard, are you mad! Let go—let go!" No answer, but the sound of gasping breath, as he rammed his knuckles into Bertie's throat, looking down into his white face as it grew whiter and whiter, with the air of a demoniac.

"Help! help! help!" she cried, as her head swam, and all her strength seemed gone into her hands—the hands with which she was trying so hard to hold him back.

One moment more and it would be too late. Bertie's head was hanging over the edge; the chances seemed to be that they would all three fall together.

"Better so," thought Pera, recklessly; "better to die than to be left behind."

The faintness of exceeding horror was creeping over her, but she forced herself to raise her voice once more. Thomas might choose to hear, or Captain Valentine, or some boy from the stables.

There was not much hope, as the ruins were always deserted after sunset, no tourist being admitted when daylight faded, and the mansion the small household at the Gatehouse was wont to give them a wife berth in consequence of the popular report that Killingsworth was haunted.

"Help!—help!—help!"

There was a shout in answer.

"Are coming! Where are you?"

"Oh, joy, they were saved! The next moment a powerful arm was thrown round her, whilst Valentine seized Vanittart with the other. Bernard struggled desperately, but he was released by a policeman, and Bertie was dragged down under him, half choked.

Pera sank down on the ground, and lifted his head upon her lap, her tears falling fast upon his face, whilst she shook all over like a leaf in the wind. Val loosened his tie, and looked anxiously into his face.

"He will do now," he said, cheerfully. "What on earth brought you here? I've been looking for you everywhere."

"We came to find Mrs. Mitford," in a shaky voice.

"Did you find her?"

"No!"

Vyvyan looked up into the face that was bending over him, his whole heart in his eyes. It seemed to him that he had come from death to find himself in heaven, and that the least movement would send him back to earth.

Then he passed his hand over his forehead, and remembered Eva! Pulling himself together he raised his head.

"Val, is that you?" he asked, huskily, turning his eyes away from the face that he loved, but thrilled to the innermost kernel of his heart by the knowledge that her tears had fallen on his cheek.

"Mrs. Mitford is down there, I'm almost sure!"

"Good Heaven! Do you mean he has murdered her?"

"I heard a groan—that's what brought me here."

"Stop!" cried Vanittart, waking up as if from a stupor, "she isn't here—she's miles away."

"Tell me where her husband is?" stepping up to him, and looking him full in the face, "Have you murdered him as you've tried to murder Vyvyan?"

"Murder! Who talks of murder?" he said in a hollow voice, his eyes shifting, his lips working convulsively.

"I do. You would have murdered Vyvyan if I hadn't been here, and probably Miss Clifford too."

"No, no, not Pera—not little Pera!" raising his handcuffed arms, as if in a wild appeal against the thought of such a crime.

"Where's Mrs. Mitford? We are answerable for her safety, and we shall not stir from this place till we know where she is."

No answer.

"Hark! I do hear a groan! Oh! Bernard," clasping her hands, "have you been dead

enough to throw that poor woman into that wretched hole?"

"I sent her to her husband—let me go!" struggling hard to set himself free.

The policeman pulled out his whistle, and blew it shrilly. It echoed far and wide, and before long was answered by another from the road.

"Miss Clifford, won't you go home? This is no place for you," said Val, earnestly.

"I can't go till I know about Lucy."

"May I run to the Gatehouse, and get ropes?"

"Oh, certainly! I suppose we can't keep it from papa."

"No," in a low voice. "It is all up with Mr. Vanittart after this."

"Yes," with a shudder.

"It isn't his fault," said Vyvyan, anxious to console her, as they both waited by the dungeon for Valentine's return. "Something has turned his brain."

"Mad?" with horror-struck eyes.

"Yes, mad! I saw it in his eyes." Then he pulled some matches out of his pocket, and held them over the pit, but their light travelled only a little way down the massive wall, and he could see nothing beyond. "Mrs. Mitford, are you there?" he called out softly, his heart full of pity for the deserted wife, as he thought of the little child at home waiting for her.

"For Heaven's sake, save me!" in a smothered tone came from the depths.

"Yes, yes!" cried Pera, with a gasp.

"We will save you directly. Oh Heaven! what will become of us!" as she rocked herself to and fro, in an agony of distress and horror.

Bernard, her own cousin, a murderer or a madman—or both! Could any horror be equal to that? And the woman whom he had tried to murder had been sent to him by herself! She it was who told Lucy that there was nothing to fear, and that she would be close by to protect her, and give her courage.

And then, in the moment of danger, she had forgotten her, and allowed her to be half murdered, whilst she herself was lost in a dream of forbidden sweetness.

There seemed no loophole of light. There, only a few feet from her, stood her cousin, with handcuffs on his wrists, and a policeman on guard by his side—and down in the darkness, where she could not see her, was his victim! Was it a nightmare from which she would wake, to find it all a dream?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A POLICEMAN appeared at the head of the steps which led to the dungeon-tower, but at a sign from the constable, who was already in guard over the prisoner, he remained where he was, drawn up stiff and straight like a figure in bronze.

There was a sound of many footsteps, and Captain Valentine came up as fast as his long legs could bring him with a coil of rope. He was followed by old Thomas with a lantern, and the gardener and groom with a ladder.

In their wake came Sir Roger, his face stern and set, his eyes on the alert. He looked at his nephew's haggard face and disordered dress. Words of fierce denunciation were on his lips, but he turned from him, with a shake of the head and an expression of pity, and said nothing.

Meanwhile the ladder was lowered, and not being long enough to reach the bottom was let down by a rope. Then the helpers stood back, not one of them having the courage to venture into those unknown depths.

There was no fear, but intense eagerness in Vyvyan's heart. Much against Valentine's wish he insisted on going down the ladder first, and whilst Pera held her breath he let himself cautiously over the edge, holding on with his hands, and feeling about with his feet until he found the topmost rung.

Then he disappeared from sight till Val fastened the lantern on to the end of a rope,

and let it drop down as far as it would. A large expanse of slimy wall was visible, half-covered with decaying moss, and close against it at the bottom was something that might be a bundle of old clothes.

"She is here!" said Vyvyan, his voice sounding smothered and strange; "but she has fainted."

"I'm coming," and the next moment the rope which held the lantern was in Thomas's hands, and Valentine already descending the ladder.

Sir Roger turned to the groom.

"Martin, run back and take the farm-yard gate off its hinges. Throw a horse cloth over it, and bring it here as quickly as you can."

The groom touched his forelock, and ran off. Pera, who was watching the proceedings with breathless interest, glanced to cast a glance towards her unhappy cousin. Their eyes met, and held by a fascination she could not resist she was unable to look away.

His lips formed the word, "Come!" and his lips seemed to draw her to him by a magnetic attraction. She could not help going up to him, although her whole interest was centred in what was happening down in the dungeon.

"Take those things off; they are hurting my wrist," looking down at his handcuffs.

There was a wound on his right wrist, probably caused by his frantic efforts to free himself; and at the sight of the blood trickling down, in spite of all that he had done, her heart was full of pity in a moment.

"Can't you take them off?" she asked the constable.

"It's against the rules, miss."

"The devil's gone out of me," said Bernard, his large eyes looking unutterably sad. "If this lady will stay by me, I'll stand here till 'kingdom come.'"

The constable hesitated, and looked at Sir Roger for instructions, as the Baronet was a magistrate. Sir Roger, with that unwillingness to believe in the wickedness or madness of his own relation, which is common to most, and only having heard an imperfect account of all that had occurred, bent his head in sign of permission.

The handcuffs were removed, and Bernard folded his arms, whilst his head drooped on his chest. His frenzy was past, as he had said, and only the deepest dejection had set in. There was evidently nothing to fear from him now, and the attention of all was fixed upon Valentine and Vyvyan.

"Lend a hand," cried the former, and eager arms were stretched out, the constable amongst the number.

Slowly the body of Lucy Mitford was dragged over the edge and laid quietly on the ground, amidst profound silence. Pera, though faint with anxiety and fear, knelt down by her, and loosed her bonnet strings.

The once neat little bonnet was battered and crushed; the face was very white, except where soiled with the mud and dirt at the bottom of the pit; the eyes were shut, the lips pressed tightly together, except when they opened slightly to emit a groan.

Bertie Vyvyan said something in a low voice to Sir Roger, who immediately suggested that the poor woman should be placed on the gate, which Martin by this time had brought, and that Pera should accompany her to the Gatehouse where she had better be lodged for the present, and a messenger must be sent at once for the doctor.

Very tenderly the two young officers lifted Lucy on to the improvised litter, Pera arranging the horse-cloth with careful hands; then the groom and the gardener placed themselves at either end, as well as the narrow space would allow, and carefully going down the steps, with a helping hand from the others, proceeded at a slow pace towards the Gatehouse.

Pera walked by the side. Bernard looked after her, made a step as if he would have followed her, then recollecting himself, stopped still, and hung down his head as before.



[PERA SANK DOWN ON THE GROUND AND LIFTED BERTIE'S HEAD UPON HER LAP, HER TEARS FALLING FAST UPON HIS FACE.]

"Now sir, I suppose there is nothing more to wait for?" said the constable, anxious to walk off with his prisoner, and put him in safe custody.

"Yes," said Vyvyan, "we haven't finished yet. Ready, Val?"

"Yes, let me go first," as an expression of mingled disgust and horror passed over Bertie's features.

"No. All my life hangs on the result," in a low voice, and without any further delay he let himself down into the pit. Val followed, and after a short interval they came slowly back again, bearing a heavy burden between them.

"Somebody give a hand!" said Val. "Not you," to Sir Roger, who stretched out his arm, "but one of the policemen."

The one who had been stationed at the top of the steps came forward at a sign from his superior officer.

Very slowly the burden was hoisted over the edge, and placed where Graves's wife had lain only a few minutes before.

Sir Roger stared, wondering what new and terrible discovery was going to be made, whilst Vyvyan, with trembling fingers that scarcely dared to touch, tried to arrange the stiffened limbs into a recumbent posture, and Valentine held the lantern to the dead man's face.

A black beard, matted together with slimy mud, covered the chin; and the nose, more attenuated than in life, stood out in startling prominence from the sunken cheeks, whilst the eyes were wide open, and glaring, as if in fearful, petrified defiance.

Owing to the depth of the pit, which had kept it to a certain degree from the open air, the face was still recognisable, and Vyvyan knew it at once.

"This is the body of Anthony Graves," he said, solemnly, with a thrill of agitation and horror running through him, as he stood by the corpse of the money-lender, who had once been a kind friend to him in his need.

"Anthony Graves!" exclaimed the constable, "the man whom we are after?"

All eyes were fixed on the motionless face in profound silence.

"How did the man come here?" asked Sir Roger. "He never had anything to do with Lillingsworth?"

"He came here by your nephew's invitation," said Valentine, sternly.

At the mention of Bernard's name all looked round, especially the constables with a sudden misgiving. There lay the body of his victim, but where was the murderer? He had been forgotten in the absorbing interest of the discovery of the long-missing money-lender, and now he was nowhere to be seen!

The constable faced round fiercely on the other policeman. "Why the devil didn't you look after him?"

"I left him to you!"

There was no time for mutual recrimination. They were both going to start in pursuit of the fugitive when Vyvyan stopped one of them. He did not care for Vansittart's punishment half as much as he did for the clearing of his own name.

"I call you to witness that Mr. Vansittart was the cause of Graves's death. He tried to murder his wife in the same way, and he brought me here under the promise that he would send me where I should find them both. Captain Valentine only arrived in time to save me from the same death, as he will tell you!"

The constable was writing as fast as he could in his note-book. He looked up.

"I've taken it all down in my notes, sir, and I shall be ready to bear witness to what I have seen with my own eyes. Of course, the rest of the witnesses will appear at the proper time and place?" with a glance at Valentine and the Baronet.

Sir Roger placed his hand on Vyvyan's arm.

"Don't judge the boy by what you have

seen to-night. His father was mad before him, and Bernard has inherited the curse. Ever now, whilst we are standing here, pulling him to pieces, as likely as not the boy has killed himself."

"You're right, your honour," and the constable put up his note-book hastily, and was in the act of departing when he suddenly recollected, and looked back at the corpse lying so still—a silent memorial of a secret sin.

"I will see to that," said Sir Roger quietly, and the policeman, with a hurried "thank you, sir," went off.

Pera was attending to Lucy Mitford in the bed-room which was generally called the spare-room, and which opened out of her own on one side. She was bathing her bruised forehead with warm water and trying to cheer her up, when the door was burst open, and Bernard, haggard and dishevelled, stood before her.

He caught hold of her hands before she could resist, and kissed them passionately, muttering, "Good-bye, darling! for the last—last time!"

Lucy uttered a faint scream, but the next moment he was gone.

A few minutes later, as the two brother-officers were joining in the search for him, a pistol-shot rang out from close to Amy Robsart's tower, and, on hurrying to the spot, they found him lying face downward on the grass—an unreal peace on his handsome features—a sudden stillness in his wild, untutored heart.

(To be continued.)

We crave good gifts—wealth perhaps, or fame, or love. But do we think what they mean? Responsibility; and responsibility means work and self-denial. Happiness is the unknown quantity which is continually working itself out by holding to these.



[A MESSENGER OF EVIL.]

NOVELLETTE.]

THE BRIDE'S OMEN.

CHAPTER I.

"THE gathering to-morrow is to be vera grand, Aline; vera grand, indeed."

"Is it, mother?"

"Yes. Why, do you think?"

"Because some great folk are going?"

"Ay, bairn, that's it—vera great folk."

"Who, mother?" and Aline Stewart lifted her soft blue eyes, and looked interrogatively, yet without a shade of curiosity, and little interest, at her companion.

"Whom do you think?"

"I don't know."

"Guess, lassie."

"I'm not good at guessing."

"Weel, make ain' venture."

Thus pressed, Aline suggested Mrs. Macintosh, which suggestion was met with a sniff of contempt, and an assurance that she was 'naeboddy' in comparison with the grandee Mrs. Stuart alluded to. Then the young girl named the Macgregors, the Campbells, the Macleods, and several other families of some note in the neighbourhood, all of which were pooh-poohed by her mother as too contemptible to be mentioned in the same breath with this mysterious nob, whose grandeur was to eclipse every one else's.

"Who can it be?"

"A body ye once kened," announced Mrs. Stuart, triumphantly.

"That I knew! Oh, mother, I have never known anyone better than the Macleods or the Campbells," she exclaimed.

"I tell ye, ye have," snapped the irascible old Scotchwoman. "Don't contradict me. Don't I ken better than a mere bairn like you?"

"Of course, agreed Aline, meekly. "O

the Campbells being connected with titled people, even royalty itself, I could not think of any one greater than a girl in my position might know."

"And what may your position be, pray, that ye should na ken grand folk?" demanded her peppery parent, with visibly-increasing wrath.

"We are only middle-class people, mother, and—"

"Middle-class people, indeed!" almost shrieked the elder woman. "Middle-class people! What are ye talking about, ye hinny? Why, is na ye father descended from Bonnie Prince Charlie himself, in a direct line, and what more do ye want than that? Some of the best bluid in Scotland flows in your veins, tho' ye don't seem to ken it; for am not I descended from Wallace?—the great Wallace, the man Burns writes of in his poem—'Ye Scots wha haw! Wallace bled!'" She always said this when descanting on her descent, or rather her supposed descent, for her pedigree really was a very ordinary one. "And what more can ye want than that, eh, lassie—what more than that?"

"Nothing, mother," responded Aline, calmly, for she was well accustomed to these outbursts of pomposity, and equally well aware that nearly every Scotch man and woman in their heart of hearts secretly believes him or herself to be a Stuart, a Bruce, or a Wallace, if they happen to bear one of the three names, and illustrious and important to the last degree.

Now, Mrs. Stuart was certainly neither illustrious nor important. Her great grandfather had kept a shop near the old Tolbooth at Edinburgh, and this worthy and saving old person's son had entered the law, and added to the money left by the first old Wallace, so that Jessie Stuart's father had come into a pretty penny, and considered himself a fine gentleman, and gave himself fine airs, and soon managed to get rid of the fortune his progenitors had laboriously scraped to-

ge her; at his death leaving his wife and four daughters almost destitute, and with little means of making a livelihood, for the girls' education had been sadly neglected, and they were only fit to play the part of fine ladies, lolling on sofas reading novels, doing their hair in the latest mode, and having their gowns made in the height of the fashion. They could not do this, of course, and would have fared badly save for their extreme good looks, which quickly won them husbands—not very brilliant matches, perhaps, yet the men they chose were fairly well off. Mr. Stuart was the least so. The three hundred a-year he started matrimony with never increased or grew beautifully more.

It remained the same, for somehow or other he did not prosper in his profession—that of a lawyer—and gave up at last his office and looking for briefs simultaneously, and retired to Braemar-cum-Tweed, to the intense wrath and indignation of his vain, ambitious wife, who, disappointed at not being the wife of a Judge Advocate at least, became soured and surly, and vented her wrath when she dared, which was not often, on her spouse, and let the only child of their marriage have the full benefit of her tempers and chagrin.

This was pleasant for Aline, for her mother was not refined, nor particular always as to what she said. The old Tolbooth shopkeeper's blood ran in her veins, and it showed in a dozen different mean ill-bred little actions and ways.

The thin veneer of society polish easily rubbed off at home, and showed her as she was—vulgar, common, illiterate.

In society she adopted a manner and mode of speech which passed muster, and was careful as to her phraseology; at home she dropped all this, and her conversation was an extraordinary mixture of broad Scotch and fairly good English that struck queerly on an unaccustomed ear.

Aline's ear was accustomed. She saw nothing odd, fortunately, about her maternal relative, and, with the exception of thinking she was a little mistaken with regard to believing she was descended from Wallace, thought all she did was right, and admired her greatly, not even resenting the snappy, snarly manner in which she was often addressed. But then she was of a singularly sweet and amiable disposition, sunny and bright-tempered, always making the best of things, thinking little of herself and much of others, and trying always to make everything smooth and fair for those around her.

To her father she was a great comfort and blessing; for though he did not greatly reprove like his wife, he was nevertheless a disappointed man, for, at the outset of his career, he had given great promise as a glazier, and thought a brilliant future lay before him. That, however, was not his greatest grief.

Soon after marriage, he began to suspect that the fine, handsome girl he had made his wife was not all his fond fancy painted her; and he found it out with frightful rapidity when he failed, and left Edinburgh for the quiet country town.

She gave him no sympathy, no consolation, only bewailed her own ill fate incessantly, with tears and moans, and bursts of temper that upset and distressed him terribly; for he was naturally a quiet man, and loved ease and peace, which his handsome, wild wife certainly did not give him.

To soothe matters, and make the best of what was bad, he let her have her own way in most things, and, by degrees, she got the reins entirely into her own hands, and there was no doubt that, in his case, "the penny mare was the best horse."

He had "married in haste and repented at leisure," like a good many other foolish folk in the world, but repentance was of no use. He had forged bonds strong enough to bind him, till the great reaper—Death—came and set him free from that slavery which so many endure, even as he did, silently, uncomplainingly, waiting for that and which is the only relief from a life worse than death.

The only sweet drop in his bitter cup was his little daughter. With what pride he watched her day by day as she grew taller and sweeter, her bonnie blue eyes more like Heaven's azure, her soft looks more golden of hue.

All along the Tweed he knew there was not a fairer, better lassie than his Aline. Where could that graceful movement be matched, that sweetness of temper, that gentleness of nature, than her voice, surely those clear, bell-like tones could not be surpassed, when she lifted her yellow-tressed head and sang the songs he loved—"Bonnie Doon," "Ye Banks and Braes," "Gin a Boddy," and other old-fashioned Scotch melodies, the white throat swelling out as the flood of music poured from her red lips, washing like a thrush in May time.

How he loved to listen to her! How it soothed his soul, and, for the time, banished the gloom melancholy that so seldom left him. His hopes, every earthly hope, centred in this frail girl. He idolized her, and yet, weak and indolent, he seemed helpless to save her from her mother, who martyred her in a way, and would have sacrificed her to her ambition without mercy.

Mrs. Stuart's hopes, too, centred in her daughter, but in a widely different fashion. Roderick Stuart loved her unselfishly, and saw in her a prop and stay for his declining years, a something to interest him to the last day of his life; his wife saw in her the means of attaining those ends which she herself had missed, thought that through her she might win those luxuries and comforts for which her soul longed, and which she had once been no stranger to in early youth, before her father's death.

How she longed to be a great woman—a woman of fashion! To lead where now she hardly dared follow; to own carriages, horses,

diamonds, servants, a big mansion, and all the other good things money buys! A rich son-in-law would hardly give her all those things, she was well aware; still, a liberal man could do a good deal, and she meant the man who became Aline's husband to be one well endowed with this world's goods. She would countenance the addresses of no other.

The mere thought of her marrying a poor man made her feel faint and ill, and think of the wretched little cottage wherein her mother spent the first few years of her widowhood, where the roof leaked, and the stairs were rickety, and not a lay would turn in the lock, nor a bolt shoot, while the carpets were threadbare, and the furniture shabby, and the laird like Mother Hubbard's cupboard.

No, Aline should marry money; on that she was determined. It did not matter in the least what was tacked on to the money. She would shut her eyes if the wealthy one was in the habit of taking more whisky-punch than was good for him. A vile temper would be mere spirit, a consumptive, only delicate, while she would not hesitate long over an idiot, or a madman, if his pockets were well lined.

She did not doubt that competition for her daughter's hand would be brisk, for she was exceptionally beautiful, and Mrs. Stuart managed always to dress her well, by practicing most rigid and horrible economies in the household, darning, at times, even summer necessities to her unfortunate family.

Roderick groaned in the spirit, yet was silent in the flesh, and submitted to this misery, as he did to all others, in pathetic silence, for long experience had taught him the uselessness of expostulating.

Anything for show, anything for grandeur. It was an immense satisfaction to know that her girl was better dressed than Mrs. Macintosh, the rich brewer's wife, and than the Misses Campbells, the elite of Braemar-cum-Tweed.

She was twisting a rich silk about as she descanted of Wallace to her child, seeing how some beautiful lace looked, draped over its shimmering folds, for she was anxious Aline should look her best on the coming night, as she knew the catch of the place and for twenty miles round was to be there.

"Well, bairn?" she queried, at last, after a lengthy pause, "aren't ye curious to hear who the laddie is that's to be there to-morrow?"

"It is a gentleman, then, mother?"

"Ay, oh ay, rest ye are. A gentleman in every sense of the word. A gallant lad. One worthy of every honour fra his toonfolk."

"Townfolk? Is he a native of this place?"

Aline put the question without interest, and merely to please her mother.

"Ay, lassie, and one ye played with when ye were a wee bit lassie."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; now guess again."

"I can't, mother; tell me."

"Jock Gordon, the laird," announced her parent, in great triumph, regarding her closely.

"Jock Gordon!" she repeated, with evident surprise, but little awe. "Do you look upon him as a great personage—a grandee?"

"Certainly I do," responded Mrs. Stuart, promptly.

"Why, he is not of such old family as the Macleods or Macgregors, or of such high birth."

"How do you ken that?"

"I know he is not; that is to say," she added, with some hesitation, "I have been told he is not."

"His siller makes him more than their equal," retorted her mother, quickly.

"Hardly, chere mere."

"Why not?"

"Most of it was made in trade."

"Rubbish! Who told you that nonsense?"

"The—the Macleods."

There was a perceptible hesitation about this speech, and her cheek flushed redly as she gave utterance to it.

"The Macleods had vera much better look after their ain affairs than be slandering their neighbours," remarked the elder woman, grimly.

"That is hardly slander."

"I say it is!"

"Every one knows that Jock Gordon's grandfather," continued Aline, calmly, without heeding the interruption, "had a whisky distillery, and made a fortune by it."

"Who's 'everybody'?" Then ye mean those Macleods, by that; pair footless things, that ha na twa expenses to jingle on a tombstone, and canna pay their just debts i' the bargain."

Aline's face flushed redly, for her mother was wrathful, therefore vulgar, and slightly untruthful and spiteful.

"No, mother; I have heard it from others besides."

"Well, dinna believe it. He's well-born and well-bred. His father's folk ha held Forrerran three hundred years and upwards, a gude auld family, as gude as any about here. Ancestors in plenty; and if one of them did marry the bairn of a trader, what does? The highest in the land dinna disdain trade nee. Looky the girl that gets him. A bonnie lassie, in truth, sin any lass might be proud of."

"Yes, he is very handsome."

"Verra," ejaculated the matronary woman, "and he's just been left a tidy bit more siller."

"Indeed; he is fortunate."

"That he is. His mother's sister has left him a gude twa thousand a year an' to what he ha fra his father."

"Quite a large fortune," remarked the young girl, quietly, not seeing anything strange in her mother's eagerness and interest in the matter.

"Ay, he's a millionaire—a millionaire. Lucky the girl who wins him for a husband!"

"Money isn't everything."

"That's wha you hinny always think. Money's a deal more than anything else in the world."

"Oh, mother!"

"It's true. Siller will help ye over the stile when love—puir, chattering love—will leave ye astride on the top, and is cauld comfort in the long run."

"I could never believe that."

"Weel, ye'll have to!" remarked Mrs. Stuart, significantly; and then, adroitly turning the conversation, she asked Aline some question about the dress.

"I will leave it entirely to you," she replied, a little indifferently. "You know best."

"Weel, ye leave it in gude hands. I'll make ye look bonnie, nae fear. Ye must look ye're best, and dazzle old friends and new acquaintances!"

"I don't think I could ever dazzle," she replied, modestly.

"Yes ye can," returned the other, confidently; "and ye must look your brightest to-morrow."

"I'll do my best, mother."

"That's reet."

"She dinna seem much impressed with Jock's return," muttered Mrs. Stuart, eyeing Aline furtively, as she sat with hands folded in her lap, gazing straight away at the distant range of snow-capped mountains that stood out vividly from the background of purple and gold clouds.

And she was not, for her thoughts were full of Kenneth Macleod—handsome Kenneth—whose eyes were as blue and as bright as her own, and which said blue eyes took such tender lights and shades when they gazed into hers, and whose strong white hands clasped hers so warmly and closely at meeting and parting, lingeringly clasping her fingers, as though loth to let go!

What room was there for a single thought of any other! Not an atom, even, for Jock Gordon, Laird of Forrerran, master of Balbiddle, owner of a mansion in Edinburgh, a shooting-box in the Highlands, and a country house near Braemar, with six thousand a year

to keep them going and a face as handsome as any woman could wish to look on.

CHAPTER II.

TOWARDS the evening of the next day there was a perceptible stir in Braemar. Maids and men-servants paid frequent visits to the sole and only florist's, whose rather limited resources were heavily taxed.

Men, carrying rout seats, passed to and fro between the Assembly-rooms and the chief confectioner's, while white-capped cooks carried all sorts of delicacies into the supper-room, daintily draped, like the large hall, in scarlet and white.

Later on, when the lights began to glimmer through the gathering gloom, carriages, flies, waggons, dog-carts, and a crowd of miscellaneous vehicles began to deposit their gaily-dressed occupants at the foot of the steep flight of balustraded stairs leading up to the rooms, while the strains of waltz-music floated out on to the night air.

Nearly everyone had arrived when Mrs. Stuart thought fit to appear with her daughter, dragging at her chariot-wheels, figuratively, her unfortunate husband, who cordially hated parties and entertainments of all kinds. But his masterful spouse, with a keen eye to appearances, insisted on his coming; consequently he came, and was thoroughly miserable and unhappy.

Not so his daughter, however. To her the whole scene was one of enchantment. At seventeen one looks at everything through the medium of rose-coloured glasses; and, as it was her first real large public ball, it is not to be wondered at that she was in a great state of excitement, and ready to admire everything, from the masses of beautiful flowers starring the banks of moss arranged in each corner of the room down to the mock-raised pies, that had seen a deal of service, decorating the supper-table.

She did not expect to dance much, as their circle of acquaintances was limited, and she was too modest to fancy herself good-looking enough to attract the attention of strangers.

She was quite unaware that she was just the fairest and prettiest thing in the whole room, in her white dress, with snowy flowers crowning the golden head, and thought the many eyes—particularly masculine ones—that turned on her face as she entered, and remained fixed there, were criticising, and not admiring.

There was certainly one whom she hoped, with a little flutter at her heart, would ask her, not once, but two or three times, to dance. Yet she was not certain that he would.

Her fears, however, were soon allayed. Kenneth Macleod was on the watch for her; he had not yet joined the giddy throng twisting, turning, revolving down the room, though three or four dances were over. He was waiting to secure her programme first, before he made any other engagement.

"How many may I have?" he whispered, as he took her card.

"I don't know," she stammered, blushing divinely, even to the tips of her shell-like ears.

"Six?" he queried audaciously, blind—willfully blind—to the black frown that disfigured Mrs. Stuart's comely face, for she counted him decidedly a detrimental, an advocate with nothing to advocate, a penniless Highlander, with a face far too handsome and a manner far too fascinating for most girls to be proof against, and she feared Aline was partial to him, from many little signs, particularly the bright, happy way in which she assented to his request for half a dozen dances.

"Six thrown away," she muttered angrily as Macleod carried off his fair partner. "I must stop this. It will never do to let it go on, especially now the Laird has returned. He used to fancy her when they were bairns.

I must fan the flame of that fancy into something warmer if I can, and I don't doubt that I could but for that Macleod. How I wish he would leave Braemar. The insolence of the man," as he whirled by, his lips very close to Aline's ear, "penniless beggar, to dare to make love to her. I must stop it! I must stop it at all risks! She must not dance so much with him."

"Roderick," she said aloud, in an imperious tone.

"Yes, my love," he rejoined, making with a start from a dream of salmon-fishing, for he was an inveterate angler, coming down to the hard, disagreeable realities of life with a bang.

"Do you see who is making love to Aline?"

"No, who?"

"Kenneth Macleod."

"As good a lad as ever stepped."

"Maybe, but he has not a saxpence to bless himself with."

"True."

"He's making love to her, and I won't have it, diana ye see?"

"I don't think so, Jessie."

"Don't think so; I am certain."

"He's too honourable for that."

"How too honourable? When a man's in love he don't stop to think of honour—very seldom, at least."

"He will."

"He won't. He'll ask her to marry him."

"No, I'll wager he won't."

"Why not?"

"Because he can't keep himself, much less a wife."

"But watch him. He'll make her care for him."

"Perhaps."

"She shan't marry him."

"He won't ask her at present."

"What do you mean?"

"He'll wait awhile till he has made some money. His prospects are good. He is going up to Edinburgh soon to be with a cousin, who has a large practice. He'll get on then wonderfully, mark my words. He'll be a man of note before many years are over."

"He shan't tie her down with such a wretched prospect," she cried, purple with rage, the feathers in her cap nodding and quivering.

"She might do worse."

"She can do much better. I will never allow it."

"If he knows that, I am sure he will be far too honourable to press his suit against your expressed wishes," and with a weary little gesture Roderick Stuart turned away, too broken spirited and indolent to make a fight for his daughter's happiness.

"Then he won't press it for the want of knowing it," she muttered, determined to let nothing stand in the way of her ambitious plans for her child's future. "I wonder if he means to come to-night!"

Even as the thought flashed across her brain she heard a deep, singularly musical voice say "Good evening, Mrs. Stuart," and turning, she greeted a tall, dark, handsome man, none other than Jock Gordon, Laird of Forfarraan.

"Ah, Mr. Gordon, you have arrived at last," she exclaimed, in her most oily and fulsome manner.

"At last," he repeated, smiling. "Am I late, then?"

"A little. Nearly everyone has arrived."

"Have you been here long?"

"Only a few minutes."

"And yet you lecture me!"

"Gentlemen are in the minority. Much wanted."

"I see. Is your daughter here?"

"Yes."

"Dancing, of course?"

"Yes. There she is, at the other end of the room."

"I trust she has some values to spare?"

"Of course she will be for you."

"I can't hope she will remember me."

"I am sure she does; she was speaking of you yesterday," declared the wily matron.

"Indeed, it is seven years since we last met. I quite thought she would have forgotten me."

"By no means; she will be very pleased to meet her old playfellow."

"I am so glad."

And Jock Gordon looked as though he was, for in his heart all these years had lingered the memory of the fair-haired, blue-eyed child with whom he had romped and played, whom he had teased, and who had dominated and commanded him; and he had seen her the night before standing in the meadow in her simple serge dress—a knot of blue flowers, blue as her beautiful eyes, at her breast. She seemed to him such a prize he determined to ask her to be his wife.

He had no friends to consult, or rather relatives, he stood alone in the world now that his aunt was dead; was master of a fine fortune and of himself. Why, then, should he not woo and win this fair Scotch lassie, who had caught his fancy?

There was no hindrance on his side, and he believed there could be little on hers, she was so young, and he knew from her mother that she had been little in society.

The course seemed clear, and he was ready to make the running; and it was with undisguised eagerness that he accompanied Mrs. Stuart in search of her.

They found her in an alcove, near the refreshment-room, where Kenneth had left her while he fought his way up to the table to get her an ice.

She was looking down at her fluffy white fan, a soft little smile playing over her rosy lips, for Macleod's looks and speeches had been such as to stir her heart with pleasant excitement, and she was going over each look, gesture, and word again, when her mother's voice broke in on her "maiden meditations," and she came back to the realities of life as fast as her father had.

"Aline, this is Mr. Gordon, whom I know you remember!"

"I can hardly hope that you do that Miss Stuart," he said, quickly and modestly; "it is so long since we met, you must have almost forgotten my name even?"

"No," she answered, smilingly; "we were speaking of you yesterday"—how her mother blessed her—and I should have recognised you anywhere."

"Really?" he queried, eagerly.

"Really," she answered, simply. "You have altered very little."

"And you have altered very much!" he responded, undisguised admiration glowing in his dark eyes.

"Yes!" she agreed, not seeing the implied compliment! "I was only a child when you left, and now—"

"And now," he interrupted quickly, "you are a fashionable young lady—a drawing-room belle."

"Hardly that," with another smile, which he thought the sweetest he had ever seen.

"Aline has not been out much; in fact hardly at all," interpolated Mrs. Stuart, thinking it time she made a remark.

"Braemar is not very gay, is it?" he laughed.

"No; still I like it."

"So do I! Old memories, you know, and associations."

"Memories of climbing the apple and pear-trees in Farmer Roy's orchard, robbing the birds' nests, letting all the chicks out of the coop, and doing other mischievous things," she said archly, giving him a glance from the blue eyes that set his pulses throbbing in a very mad fashion.

"At whose orders did I do all that?" he demanded, returning the glance with interest.

"Mine, I admit!"

"Then why upbraid me with evil deeds for which you were really responsible—not I?"

"That is the proper thing to do, isn't it?—shift one's sins on to other people's shoulders."

"If you can get other people's shoulders to shift them on to."

"Of course, you see I can!"

"Naturally my shoulders are always at your disposal, whenever you wish to make use of them."

"Thanks, I shall not forget that."

"Don't—pray!"

"I dinna think she will," exclaimed Mrs. Stuart, "for money and money a time you've carried her on them!"

"Yes; many times," agreed the Laird, while the girl flushed up rosily.

"Will you have your ice now, Miss Stuart?" asked Kenneth, some degree of annoyance showing in his manner, for he had stood by unobserved for some minutes, and did not at all relish this reminiscence conversation, though the others seemed to.

"Thanks, yes," she replied, taking it from him. "Had you much trouble in getting it? I am afraid you had. You were away so long."

It was Gordon's turn now to be displeased, and with a nod of recognition at the other young man he was turning away, feeling he was *de trop*, when his would-be mother-in-law whispered to him that he had not asked for dances. She did not want to give Kenneth a chance of getting any more if she could possibly help it.

"Have you a dance to spare?" murmured Jock, leaning over her in a devoted and lover-like fashion.

"Oh, yes, plenty!" she acknowledged, artlessly, while her mother frowned at her simplicity. She would have written fictitious names on the card, and then have made a favour of letting the Laird scribble his over them.

"Then may I have plenty?"

"Yes," she acquiesced, to Kenneth's intense disgust, for Gordon began scoring up at a great rate, threatening not to leave a single one vacant. He stopped, however, at about the eighth, and reluctantly gave her back her programme.

"I did not know Gordon was such an intimate friend of yours," he remarked, as the Laird escorted Mrs. Stuart back to the ball-room, who felt an intense and awful convulsion of rage at having to leave her goose, who was to lay golden eggs for her, with a detrimental, and so dangerous an one as Macleod.

"Didn't you?"

"No, I have never heard you speak of him."

"Well, really, the old adage, 'out of sight, out of mind,' is applicable in this case, for I had nearly forgotten all about him until reminded by his reappearance here, of his existence."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes. You know he has been away seven years!"

"Really! I did not know. Then you were quite a little girl when he went?"

"Yes."

"I see. A case of infantile love and affection."

"What!" she exclaimed in astonishment, not quite catching what he said, and being unable to understand why he looked so gloomy and put out, not knowing that he loved her devotedly, and was madly jealous of his rich rival.

"Oh, nothing. Shall we go back to the ball-room? Of course you are engaged for this?" as the strains of "The Serenade" came swelling down the corridor.

"Yes, to Mr. Gordon."

"Lucky fellow! I wish I stood in his shoes!"

"Do you? Why?" and she looked at him in innocent astonishment.

"Why," he returned, with a little awkward laugh, for he felt that he dared not say too much, "because you are going to dance this with him, and it is a lovely valse, good time you know."

"But you have others?"

"Of course, and I shall look forward to them," and with a bow he left her as Gordon approached.

Those last few words made her feel wonderfully happy. She did not know why, and she seemed more sparklingly and brilliantly beautiful to the Laird than ever; consequently he fell fathoms deeper in love, said all sorts of extravagant things, and would inevitably have prematurely disclosed his affection, had she not been simplicity itself, and he an old playmate, and therefore in her eyes a privileged person.

"I hope old relations will be renewed between us!" he ventured, during the last dance.

"Old relations!" she repeated, with another arch smile. "Do you want me to assist in robbing orchards, and be *particeps criminis* over setting young chickens adrift from the maternal home? Or do you expect me to climb trees and go a birds' nesting?"

"Hardly," he responded, with an answering smile. "Those elaborate skirts," with a glance at the shimmering white silk, "are hardly calculated to stand tree-climbing or orchard-robbing."

"I might put something else on!"

"You might, but white is the prettiest. You ought always to wear it!"

"Why?" with an uplifting of the long-fringed lids.

"Because it is the emblem of youth and innocence!"

"Oh! But just fancy what a number of gowns I should want if I *always* wore white."

"A fresh one every day."

"At least two sometimes. It would be a rather costly whim, one I could hardly carry out."

"Why not?" he demanded, for like the rest of the little world of Braemar, he thought the Stuarts were comfortably off, Mrs. Stuart managed so well to hide their poverty from outside eyes.

"Because I could not afford it," she answered, simply, forgetting, with her usual naïveté, her mother's strict injunctions that she was never to let anyone know Mr. Stuart was not *Midas* and *Croesus* rolled into one.

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed the Laird, wishing he had the right to dress her—deck her out in costly finery.

"Well," he went on, after a pause, "what is to be the answer to my question?"

"Why—if you really won't want me to climb trees or do anything of that sort, the answer will be—Yes."

"We shall really be friends, intimate friends?"

"Oh, yes, of course," she agreed, hardly, or indeed not thinking at all, of what that implied.

"Then I claim the privilege of an intimate friend, and shall come and see you to-morrow," he exclaimed, joyfully.

"Do," chimed in *Mère Stuart*, warmly, for she was standing at the door ready shawled and cloaked as Gordon led her daughter out.

"We shall expect you early."

"Thanks; I shall avail myself of your kind invitation, and come *de bonne heure*," he returned, as he helped them into the hired and extremely shabby vehicle, which Mrs. Stuart dared not keep waiting any longer, lest she might be charged an extra "saxpence," and then turned away after they drove off, and, donning a long ulster, none too warm for a drive of five miles through the chill Scotch air, lit a cigar, and mounting into his smart dog-cart, took the reins from a dapper groom, and toolled the grey mare along at a gentle pace, as he was in no hurry to reach Forfar.

ran, having plenty of pleasant things to think of, unlike Macleod, who watched the girl he loved as she departed from afar; and then, with a heavy sigh, took his way on foot to the comfortless rooms which were his temporary home, downcast and saddened at the thought of the rich and powerful rival who had sprung up, like *Jonah's gourd*, in a single night, and threatened destruction to all those rosy hopes which had grown brighter and brighter during the past two years since he had known Aline Stuart.

Not that he doubted her, but her mother—

there lay the rub, there was the stumbling-block.

The keen young lawyer had gauged to the depths that shallow, false nature; knew how pitiless and heartless she would be to her own child—and then no tie existed between him and the girl he wished to make his wife. No word of love had been spoken. There was only that unspoken, intangible something between them that draws two souls together.

He thought she cared for him, but had had no assurance of it from her; and now—now he might never get it, for this new lover and old friend was handsome enough to fascinate and charm most women, even setting aside his worldly advantages, which Macleod felt sure would not weigh with Aline; and, also, he was favoured by her parents, or at least by one, and was to have free run of the house—that much he had overheard—which would give him an immense advantage; while he, Kenneth, could never hope for that, as Mrs. Stuart was dead against him, and made no secret of her dislike.

Altogether the future looked so dark for him that it was no wonder he did not whistle in his usual cheery fashion, but went homeward with down-bent head and lagging step.

CHAPTER III.

"You will come, won't you, Miss Aline? It will all be quite incomplete without your presence."

The Laird of Forfar sat on the window-sill of the morning room at Dalleron, as the Stuart's small house was named.

It might have looked odd to see a stalwart figure in tweed seated on a window-sill, if there had been any one to look, but the house was a little way out of Braemar, and the trees in the kitchen garden were well leaved and hid that part from sight, and there were not many passers-by at the best of times, for Dalleron was not on the high road, which accounted for its remarkable cheapness, as it was a pretty little place, with a sweet wilderness of a garden around it, stocked with old-fashioned flowers, plants, and herbs, that was looking its best on this last day of April, showing that "costly summer was at hand," coming tripping quickly on the heels of an exceptionally mild spring.

Winter was over—cold, bleak winter—that there was abundant proof. Along the road the hedge-rows made undulating green rivers; the banks were dappled with primroses, while the ladysmocks were beginning to flourish in all their beauty, keeping company with the wood anemones and dog violets, and encouraging the bluebells to appear; the nests of the thrushes and blackbirds were hid snugly and cozily behind a drapery of fresh green leafage. The horse-chestnuts were getting well furnished, preparatory to their cones swelling into flower; the oaks yellowing at the tips; the maples opening for the sun-god's rays; the hawthorns in full leaf. The cuckoo called perpetually in an adjacent wood, where a misel-thrush and some of his brethren kept up an unending chorus.

All nature was bright and fresh and pleasant to look at; and so was Aline, as she sat in the bay-window seat in a white washing gown, a bunch of violets at her throat, and a bowl of gooseberries on her knee, at which she was daintily working, heading and tailing the little green marbles, while the laird watched the white hands fluttering to and fro with a tender look in his dark eyes.

"You will come, won't you?" he repeated.

"Of course," she answered, promptly. "I would not miss seeing it on any account."

"Thanks," he murmured, rapturously.

"Only fancy, I have never seen a maypole, nor the lads and lasses dancing around it in all their holiday finery."

"No, so you told me," he responded, not adding that that was the sole reason of his having had one erected on his estate for the morrow's gala, in order that she might see it,

for he had received a hint from his would-be mamma-in-law to be cautious in his wooing, lest he might scare the bird, and lose all chance of trapping her for his nest.

"Did I?"

"Yes a long time ago."

"And you remembered it?"

"Yes, I remember most things you say."

"That is because we are friends, I suppose," with a girlish laugh.

"Of course," he agreed, refraining from remarking that there was a far more potent reason for his good memory with regard to anything she said or did.

"And what is the pole to be like?"

"As high as the mast of a vessel of a hundred tons."

"Good gracious! what a height."

"Yes, it sounds tall, doesn't it."

"Very tall. And will it look like the mast of a vessel?"

"At first when it is planted, not afterwards; for it will be dressed up with ribbons, and flowers and things."

"Like those?" nodding at a posy of lovely roses he had brought her from the Forfar conservatories.

"Partly, but mostly it will be decked with May. You know that is the very flower that was selected one May-day morning in the Middle Ages to be brought home with sound of tabor, and flourish of horn, and put on post, and lintel, and window-sill."

"Was it really, I did not know," and she looked at him her beautiful eyes full of inquiry. "Tell me more about it."

"Well, it was a very popular custom at one time. Kings and queens were not above giving their royal approval of it. I read once that bluff King Hal used to go out with Catherine of Arragon to Shooter's-hill to meet the corporation of London, as they returned bringing from the Kent fields their May-day trophies."

"How funny! I should so like to have seen it."

"I dare say. You never can see bluff King Hal now."

"Of course not. Is Shooter's-hill a pretty place?"

"Yes, very, considering how near London it is."

"I wish I could see it, it would be a spot full of interest to me."

"Perhaps you will see it, some day," he rejoined, thinking as he gazed at her face how much he would like to take her there and show her all the other pretty spots without London, and all the wonders within.

"No, I'm afraid not," she said, shaking her golden head until it glinted again in the sun-rays. "We have never been further than Edinburgh; I am sure father could not afford such a long, expensive journey."

"Some one else might take you," hazarded the laird.

"There is no one who could or would."

"Isn't there," he thought.

"We have very few relatives, and none of them rich enough to go to the expense of taking me such a trip."

"It need not be a relative, a friend might—" he began; but the opportune arrival of Aline's mother interrupted the *telles-à-telles*; opportune, for had he spoken then, he would have met with a refusal to the offer of his hand, heart, and fortune.

The next day, May-day, dawned bright and beautiful. The sky was clear blue, the sunshine steady, the wind blowing softly from the west, in the air a sweet promise of coming summer.

Aline thought there could not be a better day for the Maypole sports, as she donned an elaborately-embroidered white dress, which Mrs. Stuart had pinched and starved and practised many mean little shifts in order to be able to buy, since she learnt Jock Gordon's fancy for colourless clothing.

He was certainly right, white suited Aline far better than anything else; she looked simply lovely, as she descended from the

shabby fly at Forfar, and he came down the broad flight of steps to greet her and her parents, his heart throbbing high with the hope that some day this beautiful girl would be mistress of his home, bound to him by the closest, most enduring, most tender tie that can bind man and woman together.

But if he looked with longing at her, so did another, and with a greater longing, for he felt it was almost a hopeless one—and that other was Kenneth Macleod.

He had come to the May-day gathering sorely against his will in one way—for he did not wish to be guest to the man he knew was his rival—though he was glad enough to seize the opportunity of seeing her once again, for Mrs. Stuart had managed to keep Aline out of his way; but his sister Helen would not refuse the invitation. Invitations were rare in and about Braemar, and as there was no one else to take her Kenneth had to make virtue a necessity; and there he was on the laird's lawn, talking to two bonnie Scotch lassies, while his eyes were fixed on Aline's face, drinking in all the fair loveliness of it.

It was not long before he found his way to her side.

Gordon, in his capacity of host, had his hands full, and could not linger, as he would have wished, near her. He had to be about and doing, and left the coast clear for Kenneth, who was not slow to avail himself of the opportunity.

"It is a long while since we last met," he said, when they had sauntered a little way from the chattering crowd.

"Yes, isn't it?" she agreed. "We used to meet so often; I can't imagine why it is we have not done so lately. Were you at the Macgregor's dance last Thursday?"

"Yes, and expected to see you there."

"We were going. Mr. Gordon was to drive us over; but, at the last moment, business prevented him, so mother would not go."

"Ah, I see!"

His tone was full of the bitterness that surged in his heart.

"I was awfully disappointed," he went on, "when I found you did not come."

"Were you?" she asked, looking up at him with a shy smile, and then dropping her eyes at once when she encountered the ardent gaze of his.

"The pleasure of my evening was quite spoiled."

"Oh! Why?"

"Because I only went to see you; and when I found you were not there, I was disgusted, and left as soon as I could."

"Was not that a pity?" she murmured, with blushing cheeks. "I heard it was a nice dance."

"I dare say it was to those who were interested in the guests present. You see, my interest centred elsewhere."

She made no response to this. She was silent, a feeling of shy delight keeping her so; for had he not as much as told her that his interest centred on her? It was the dawn of love to her—"Love's young dream"—and it filled her heart with a rare pleasure that would never come to her again in all her life.

"Shall I see you Tuesday night, at Cameron's gathering?" he went on, a new look full of fire in his blue eyes, bent so earnestly on her face.

"Yes," she responded, I shall be there."

"I want you to promise me quite half the programme. Will you?"

"It is a great many," she hesitated, a vision of her maternal relative's angry face flashing before her mind's eye.

"And I have a great deal to say to you," he pleaded. "Something of importance to myself, on which will depend the whole happiness of my future life. Promise!" he urged, as he saw her mother approaching.

"I promise," she murmured, faintly.

"Aline," said Mrs. Stuart, in pompous tones, "the dance round the Maypole is about to begin; if you wish to see it you had better

come. I will relieve you of your charge, Mr. Macleod."

"Pray don't!" he said, earnestly. "Let me escort you there." And as she had no excuse ready, she was obliged to accede to his request, to her own intense annoyance and mortification; for, as they arrived in the field in which the pole reared its flower-crowned head, Gordon came to meet them, and his eyes rested on Macleod in a questioning way, while a shade fell across his face.

More than once he looked again at his younger rival, while the country lads and lasses footed it away right merrily around the Maypole, singing and dancing with a will, and waving their sweet-scented garlands high in the air, for Macleod kept his ground by Aline's side, and there was a something—a look, a light on her face, as she listened to Kenneth's conversation—that set the laird a-thinking, and determined him on speaking to his tried friend and ally, Jessie Stuart.

"Mrs. Stuart, pardon me," he commenced, drawing her aside from the merrymaking crew to the comparative seclusion of the rose garden, "but you know, I am sure, what an interest—what a very great interest—I take in your daughter, and all that concerns her?"

"Thanks, yes; I ken ye are vera kind about the bairn," she exclaimed, in her excitement, forgetting her elegant vernacular and relapsing into broad Scotch, for she hoped a permission to woo was going to be asked for.

"Well," he went on, with considerable hesitation, "I want to—know—to the best of your belief—is she heart-whole?"

"Why, bless me, yes! What makes you ask such a vera queer question?"

"Forgive me, if you deem it an impertinence."

"No, no! not from you!" she hastened to assure him.

"I thought," he continued, still with great hesitation, "that—that she and young Macleod were very good friends—that perhaps they were engaged!"

"By no means," returned his companion, with a bland smile, feeling, nevertheless, as though a pailful of cold water had been poured down her back. "Good friends they are, certainly; but nothing more, I assure you. Helen Macleod, his sister, is Aline's most intimate crony, and that, of course, accounts for his civility to her."

"Of course, of course," assented Gordon, feeling much relieved in his mind. "I did not know that. He is so attentive, I quite thought it was a case!"

Mrs. Stuart felt inclined to rap out a naughty word; but she managed to control her feelings, and repeat her assurances and denials, cleverly insinuating that if Aline had a leaning towards anyone it was towards Jock himself—a remark that made him feel extremely, nay foolishly, happy, and go back to his guests and his Maypole with renewed lightness of heart; while his whilom companion determined, there and then, to play a dangerous card, and try appealing to Kenneth himself to retire from the field, and leave the course clear for his wealthy rival.

She sought him for some time in vain; but towards evening, when dancing had commenced amongst the gentry in the great hall at Forfar, she found him leaning against the wall, watching Aline, as she floated by in Gordon's arms.

"Mr. Macleod, can I have a word with you? Can you spare me a few moments?" she asked, touching his arm.

"As many as you wish," he answered, politely and readily, a foreboding of something wrong coming at his heart, nevertheless.

And this foreboding proved true. Cleverly and unsparingly she put the case before him, painting, with no unskilful hand, the life that would be Aline's if she married him—allied herself with poverty; and then showing the other side of the picture—the brilliant future that would be hers if she became mistress of Forfar, finally appealing to his sense of

honour and his love for Aline to induce him to give her up.

In silence he listened, giving no sign of the inward pain that raged in his breast, the war that was going on; and when she finished, he only said, quietly,—

"You are right, Mrs. Stuart. As a man of honour, the only thing I can do is, I leave Braemar and relinquish every hope of happiness in giving up your daughter!"

She had touched the right chord. Kenneth Macleod's honour was at stake, and he threw happiness into the other scale, and won the battle!

He sought his sister at once, and left Forfar.

Vainly Aline's eyes wandered round, seeking the well-known form. It was nowhere to be seen, and she went home that night feeling that May-day sports, after all, were not so very amusing.

CHAPTER IV.

MACLEOD had given his promise to Mrs. Stuart not to see her daughter again, save once to say adieu, and that once he determined should be at the Cameron's dance.

Restless and miserable, eager to get over the painful interview, he arrived there, but the one he sought did not appear until close upon midnight.

These were always Mrs. Stuart's tactics. She would bring Aline into a room at a late hour, looking cool and fresh and sweet, without a ribbon tossed, or a flounce crumpled, or a braid disarranged, when other women were flushed with dancing, their hair towzled, their gowns torn and limp from the crush, and her beauty would strike on all male observers with fresh force.

On this occasion she looked very beautiful, yet pale, he thought, or was it the blue dress he wondered? He waited for two dances before he claimed her, and then he began in rather an abrupt fashion.

"This is the only dance I shall ask for, Miss Stuart."

"Why?" she exclaimed, looking at him rather wistfully. "Is it because we are so late?"

"Partly," he returned, stealing himself against the pleading look in the soft blue eyes.

"Have you to leave early?"

"Yes."

For the life of him he could not have uttered another word. Something seemed to rise in his throat and choke him. A mist swam before his eyes, and for a minute the strong repression of his feelings made him almost unconscious.

"You remember," he went on after a while, when he had recovered his normal composure somewhat, "that I told you I had something to say to you to-night?"

"Yes," she assented, the wondering look on her face growing greater, for his face was pale and set, and his manner by no means that of an ardent and anxious lover.

"It is not of a very pleasant nature, at least to myself; and, as we have been friends, I venture to think you may care to hear it, and share in a lesser degree, my feelings."

"Yes," she said again, turning white as snow, a fear overwhelming her heart, robbing the fair cheek of its roses.

"Circumstances have arisen that necessitate my almost instant departure from Braemar."

"Mr. Macleod!" There was a world of anguish in those two words, and he bit his lips fiercely to keep back the torrent of tender, loving words that rose to them.

"I leave by the early morning train!"

"So soon!" The deep, pathetic eyes looked into his for an instant in pain, but not in reproach.

"Yes."

"And—when—will you return?"

Only the pitiful falter in the clear tones, and

her deathly whiteness, betrayed her agitation. She was too unused to the world's ways to hide those, or even to make an attempt to do so.

"That is uncertain!"

"Do—you—think—your stay away will be of long duration?"

"Probably very long—in fact, I may never return!"

Once more Aline's eyes met his, speaking some intolerable pain for which her lips could frame no language.

He could not interpret this. He did not understand. Only he seemed to know then how she cared for him—how much he was to her.

"Then—this is—good-bye?" Her sweet voice was full of grief.

"Alas! yes," he answered.

"You know," he went on suddenly, as it flashed across him that she would, to say the least of it, think this conduct, this sudden running away, strange, "that I would not go if I could help. That I would much rather stay!"

"And—can you not—stay?" she asked, faintly.

"No!" he answered, firmly, while his heart was wrung with agony. "It is impossible. I must go!"

And, forgetting prudence, he begged her to remember him—to think of him kindly sometimes.

"I shall never forget you," she answered, quietly; so quietly that her calmness deceived him a little, and he thought now the first shock was over she might recover, and forget him after awhile.

In that he was wrong. Aline Stuart was not the kind of girl to forget one she had loved as tenderly as she had Kenneth Macleod, and when he clasped her hands with a lingering pressure, and, saying his last "Good-bye," turned, and left her, the best and brightest part of her youth and life went with him, and she was never quite the same again—so girlish, so lighthearted.

"Miss Aline, are you ill? What is the matter? Can I get you anything? Take my arm!"

Gordon's voice broke in on her musings, her dreaminess. She never knew whether she had stood there, by the great palm in the conservatory, a minute or an hour—stood just where Kenneth left her, the musical flash of the fountain going on with regular monotony; the sweet perfume of the flowers heavy on the air, the valse music rising and falling.

She was lost to all around, regardless of the flight of time, and might have stood there longer in that cool, dim retreat, only the laird's voice roused her.

"Are you ill?" he repeated, anxiously.

"Ill—oh, no. I am not ill," she returned, with a laugh that sounded harsh and discordant even to her own ears.

"Then why are you standing here?"

"To get cool."

"But you ought to be cool now."

"Why?"

"Because you have been here a very long time."

"Have I? Yes, of course!" she added, quickly, knowing and feeling that she must not show her feelings—dare not wear the willow, "too long, rather. I am ready to go now. Will you take me back to mother?"

"No!" he answered, promptly; "but I'll take you back to the ball-room!"

"Is this our dance?"

"It is. Are you too tired for it?"

"Not at all. I shall enjoy it," she replied, laying her little white-gloved hand on his arm, and returning with him to the ball-room, where the glare of the lights almost blinded her eyes, heavy with the smart of unshed tears, and the music and hum of many voices sound like crashing thunder in her ears.

She hardly knew what she was doing. Kenneth had left her—had passed out of her life, for aye—she knew not why. Only she was conscious of a fierce pain at her heart that

made every beat an agony; and so, to hide the deadly wound from prying eyes, she laughed and talked rather wildly—was the gayest of the gay, and, with flushed cheeks and brilliant, if sad eyes, was certainly the belle of the room and fascinated Gordon more than ever.

He saw nothing amiss with her—only she seemed more lovely, more *piquante* than he had ever seen her before, and he determined ere long to put the momentary question, on the answer to which his future happiness depended. From this rash proceeding, however, he was dissuaded by Mrs. Stuart, who knew her daughter's heart was too sore to brook, yet awhile, thoughts of a new lover, and that failure would inevitably follow; so she artfully reasoned, and argued with him, and he consented to wait until autumn or winter.

Meanwhile his mother-in-law, that was to be, was not idle. With consummate skill she worked upon the girl, who was plastic as wax in her clever hands, and by judicious praise of Gordon, and equally judicious abuse of Macleod, she managed to weave Aline's thoughts from the absent one and turn them to the man who was her patient adorer.

Little by little her determination never to forget Kenneth—never to listen to words of love from another man—was undermined. If she had none of her mother's vulgarity she was certainly largely endowed with her father's weakness and irresolution.

Besides, her vanity was hurt. Not knowing the true state of the case, it did seem strange to her that the man who had posed as her lover, paid her the most marked attention, should suddenly, without any warning, depart, leaving her to bear the brunt of any nasty remarks which her dear lady friends might wish to make; and, being jealous of her superior charms, the Braemar fair ones did make remarks, and, simple and childlike though she was, they stung her to the quick, and many and many a time brought a scorching blush of shame and agony to her fair cheek as she listened to sarcastic remarks about her faithless lover—for so she deemed him, not knowing the treacherous part her own mother had played in the affair.

The laird's attentions were balm to her wounded feelings, though she was scarcely conscious of it when she turned to him in her distress, and, seeking to forget her sorrow, threw herself with a will into all his plans and projects; and while he finally fancied she listened to his long disquisitions on the improvement of his estates, because they were his, she was trying to shut out from her heart and life all memory of that fair handsome face that had been inexpressibly dear to her.

So matters went on—summer merged into autumn, and autumn in turn gave place to hoary-headed winter; and yet not a word had she heard from the absent one, and yet had the laird curbed his eager desire to ask her to be his wife. But he would wait no longer, he told himself—the New Year was at hand, and he meant it to be the happiest of his whole life, or the most miserable.

Mrs. Stuart, consulted, as last gave her consent to the proposal being made—not that she had withheld it because she wanted to, simply from motives of caution. She was more than eager to be mother-in-law to the laird of Forfar, but knew precipitancy would ruin all.

In those dark days before and about Christmas, Gordon was much at the Stuart's house, and intuitively Aline knew what was coming. She was happy and miserable, glad and sorry, all at once. She could not analyse her feelings; hardly dared do so, only she felt a keen sense of gratitude towards Jock, because he had poured balm into her wounds—deep wounds that left an inefaceable scar behind—and because his devotion had lessened her grief and regret for the renegade who had left her.

So on New Year's Eve, when she was sitting alone in the quaint, oak-wainscoted parlour

listening to the bells ringing merrily, and Jock Gordon came to her, and told her in a straightforward manly way how very dear she was to him, and how he had hoped for some time past that she would become his wife, cheer, and gladden his life, and his home with her sweet presence, she, shy and tremulous, put her hands in his and murmured, "Yes" to his pleading, giving him the crowning blessing of his life, making him rarely happy, for he had not been sure of winning her—Mrs. Stuart having duly impressed him with a deep sense of Aline's loveliness and worth, and the number of offers—all imaginary ones—that she had received from great personages.

He was truly grateful for the joy that came into his life with Aline's acceptance of his proposal, and felt he could not do enough for his beautiful fiancée to show his affection. For her a new era commenced. He loaded her with costly presents; he drove her about in his phaeton and carriages; he anticipated every wish, was a most humble, attentive, and devoted lover, and yet—and yet—with all the brilliant prospect that lay before her, the future mistress of Forfaran was not quite happy.

Struggle as she would to subdue it, her love for Kenneth triumphed at times, and despite her efforts, the recollection of his blue eyes and winning ways would come to her, blotting out the present, making her five once again through those hours that had been fraught with so much sweetness, such subtle delight, that she knew could never come to her again in all the days of her life, notwithstanding that she had won the lasting affection of a true, good man.

"I have not given you a ring," he said, some days after the engagement was ratified.

"Have you wondered why?"

"A little," she acknowledged.

"Well, this is my reason. Here is an old family ring—a wedding ring—one that my ancestors have used for upwards of two hundred years," opening a case and displaying a queer-looking red gold ring of peculiar shape and design; "each Gordon has given it to the lady of his love as a pledge ring—will you wear it too, or will you only don this?" showing a costly sparkling diamond of modern workmanship.

"I will wear the old ring, please," stretching out her hand; and as he slipped it on to her slender finger she asked, "Is there a story attached to it?"

"Yes, only an old woman's tale, though."

"What is it?"

"Oh, some rubbish about its snapping in half the night before the last Gordon of Forfaran is to die. I am the last of my race, and I don't look much like dying, do I?" with a glance at his broad shoulders and deep chest in the mirror opposite.

"No. Still, it is a queer notion. I wonder how the idea was started?" she went on, looking a little pale, and regarding the ring as if it were a snake.

"By some old crone, you may be sure, who had nothing to do save invent fables. Don't look so scared or I shall be sorry I told you the story. Put this on," slipping the diamond on, "and don't think anything more about it."

But somehow or the other Aline's thoughts constantly reverted to it, and she regarded the red gold circlet with secret horror, though she always wore it to please her lover.

CHAPTER V.

"What a lovely ring! what a pendant! You are a lucky girl. I wish I stood in your shoes."

The speaker was Helen Macleod, who had recently returned to Braemar, and she was admiring Aline's jewels.

It was Valentine's day, and she, with a troop of other girls and some young men, was enjoying the laird's hospitality at Forfaran.

They had been in the grounds skating on the frozen lake, and now they all stood round a blazing log-fire in the library, enjoying afternoon tea. The girls were wrapped in velvets and furs, Aline in a set of priceless sables, that were at once the envy and admiration of her less fortunate friends; while Jock Gordon looked handsome and distinguished in a great-coat trimmed with the same dark fur.

They were all chatting and laughing gaily, as young people will when together, forgetful of all the woe and wretchedness in the world; for there was something to think of going to happen, a great event in quiet Braemar-cum-Tweed—no less a thing than a wedding, and a grand one too, for in a week's time Aline Stuart was to become Aline Gordon, and the junketing and merrymaking was to be of no ordinary kind.

Meanwhile, Helen Macleod, unconscious of the pain she was inflicting, continued to admire her friend's possessions, and envy her the future that lay before her, in ringing tones that were so like Kenneth's that they struck on Aline's ear with a keen pain, and she was glad when the dressing-bell rang and she could escape to her own room and from the gaze of those blue eyes, so like another pair that haunted a dim corner of her memory yet.

She recovered herself somewhat at dinner, under the cheering influence of Gordon's kindly and tender glances, and entered with spirit and zest into the fun afterwards started by Miss Macleod, who burned herself in the log fire by proxy—a nut—to see if her lover would prove true, and poured melted lead into a basin of water, and did many other things, even venturing into the garden and pulling up a plant, to see if it had much or little earth about its roots, in order that she might know if her future husband's income would be large or small.

Her companions followed her lead with much laughter and many blushes, and then someone suggested the "Luggies."

"Of course we must have those!" cried Helen. "Aline must try her fate—try 'The Bride's Omen.'"

"No, no!" said the girl, shrinking back, and turning pale; "I would rather not."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Helen, and "Oh, do!" called out the others; and at last, yielding to persuasion, she allowed her eyes to be bandaged, and advanced with uncertain steps towards the table, where three shallow dishes were arranged, one containing pure water, another foul, and the third being empty.

Anxiously all watched her. If she put her hand in the foul water, much trouble lay before her; if in the clear, her married life would be all sunshine and happiness; but if she dipped her hand into the empty Luggy, there would be no wedding that day week—at least, so the superstition ran.

Slowly she advanced—slowly, slowly—hesitated a moment, then stretched out her hand, and dipped it into the empty Luggy.

There was silence for a minute or two, which was broken by Jock's cheery voice crying, "The omen won't hold good in your case, Aline!"

"I hope not," she responded, in low tones, as she loosed the handkerchief from her eyes with trembling hands, while her lips quivered and her cheeks turned ashen pale.

Her betrothed tried to rally her, but with ill-success; and somehow or other everyone's spirits seemed to fall to zero, the fun lagged, and grew gradually less; and finally they all took their leave and dispersed, the laird driving Aline home.

"Good-bye, love!" he said, tenderly, when they arrived at Dalferoon, as he turned to remount into the dog-cart.

"Good-bye, dear Jock!" she said, more fondly than she had ever spoken before.

"This is the last time we need say that to each other," he said, looking at her, a passionate gleam in his dark eye. "When we meet again it will be to part no more. Are you glad?"

"Yes," she murmured, as his arm closed round her, and she felt his kiss on her lips.

"Not good-bye, *au revoir*," he whispered, as, with a last caress, he sprang in, and, gathering up the reins, drove off rapidly.

She watched him while he was in sight, the moonlight making it light almost as day; and then, with a sigh, she went into her home, knowing that she would not see him again until her wedding morn, for he was going up to Edinburgh on important business, and would only reach Forfaran early on the morning of the day which was to see those twain made one.

In after-days she often thought of him as she had last seen him, sitting erect and square in his dog-cart, his handsome head rising out from the great collar of sables, the moonlight full in his face, showing up its dark beauty; and she was glad to think her farewell had been kind to him.

The days fled swiftly by. She was busy—more than busy—with dressmakers and milliners, and each morning she received a long letter from Jock, breathing love and devotion in every line.

She had little time to think, and kept her thoughts from the past, determining to do her duty by the man who was to be her husband.

The wedding-day dawned at last. Clear, cold, bright—something more than a suspicion of frost in the crisp air.

As Aline looked out at the bright blue sky and golden sunshine, glinting on the stainless snow, that made the earth so fair, a sharp pain struck at her heart as she thought "what might have been," and what perfect happiness would be hers if the groom was Kenneth instead of Jock. It seemed hard that fate was so dead against her, and the man she loved. Her life was spoiled; her hopes wrecked; she seemed to realize that as she had never done before, as she stood at the window of her room, looking out over the white world with wistful eyes, idly twisting the old wedding-ring round and round on her slender finger; then dreamingly she slipped it off and looked at it with the old feeling of horror. And then—she could never tell how it happened, whether she held it awkwardly, or pressed on it, but it snapped in her hands and fell in two.

She was not superstitious, not given to thinking every little thing a bad omen, and yet as she gazed at the broken halves a chill, deadly fear fell on her, a presentiment of coming ill, terrible disaster. She trembled as she looked at the riven circlet that had bound so many faithful wives to so many tender, loving husbands, and thought of the story Jock had told her in connection with it. What would happen? Something awful, she felt. This slender thread of gold would not bind her to him now.

"What would he do?" she wondered dully, still looking at it. "Would he have it mended and give it to her to wear by-and-by, or would he keep it now as a relic?"

Her eyes grew misty as she gazed, and she would have remained there longer staring at the shattered trinket, only the voices of her bridesmaids, coming to help her to robe herself in the spotless, shimmering silk that lay on the bed; roused her from her dreamy state, and with a deep sigh she put it in its case, and opening the door let in the troop of bright, young girls, who chattered and laughed right merrily as they arrayed the bride in her snowy garments.

"Jock has not arrived," whispered Mrs. Stuart to Aline, when the latter descended to the drawing-room, looking lovely in her bridal attire and blushes.

"Has he not?" she murmured, that chill, indescribable fear again numbing her heart.

"No; I can't understand it."

"Perhaps he is late, and will go straight to the church," suggested Mr. Stuart timidly.

"That must be it," agreed his wife at once.

"It won't do to wait much longer," she added, glancing at the clock, for time was

"We had better start. Of course he is there."

"Oh, mother!" expostulated Aline, a deeper blush dying her cheek at the thought of going to the church, not knowing if her groom was there or no.

"Now don't make a fuss," rejoined Mrs. Stuart, in a fierce whisper. "If you are to be married at all we must go now;" and without more ado, without another glance at the shrinking girl, she got into one of the Forrnan carriages, and telling the bridesmaids and others assembled to take their places in the different carriages waiting, drove off to the quaint little church, some half a mile distant, followed by the others.

The bride was the last to leave, and as her father helped her in he felt her hand tremble, and pressed it tenderly, asking if she were cold. She replied in the negative, and, truth to tell, it was not the atmosphere that made her shiver but an inward feeling of horror and depression which she could not shape off.

The groomsmen came forward as the carriage drew up, but Aline's eyes sought in vain for the stalwart, manly figure of her lover. He was nowhere to be seen.

"He has not arrived," announced Mrs. Stuart to her spouse in a sepulchral whisper. "What can have happened?"

"I don't know. An accident, I fear," he responded. "Have you sent to Forrnan?"

"Yes, a messenger has just gone, and another to Dallerroon, to tell him to come on if he be there. We must wait now till they return or he comes."

And wait they did. The bride with down-drooped head, ashen cheeks, and trembling hands, her mother with ill-concealed impatience, her father with equally ill-concealed anxiety, while the bridesmaids huddled together like a flock of frightened sheep, and the groomsmen stood at the door staring down the road to catch the first glimpse of this "laggard in love," for so they deemed him, while the clergyman and the clerk tried ineffectually to keep themselves warm in the vestry.

It was a wretched half-hour. Everyone was cold, everyone was anxious, and Aline was overwhelmed with shame and fear. She felt relieved when the minister approached her father and said,—

"There can be no wedding to-day," as he heard the old clock in the tower chime out twelve.

"No wedding!" exclaimed Mrs. Stuart, furiously. "There must be; there shall be. The laird went to get a special license, I ken!"

"I have not seen it."

"No matter, he will bring it with him."

"When he does the marriage can proceed."

"Of course it will. Ah! here he is," as a clatter of horse's hoofs was heard on the frost-hardened road, and all turned simultaneously towards the door, while Aline raised her drooping head, a gleam of hope in her blue eyes.

But the gleam died away, and gave place to a scared look of fear, as one of the Forrnan grooms entered the church, his face deathly pale, the perspiration pouring off his brow, showing the pace at which he had come.

"Where is your master?" demanded Mrs. Stuart, imperiously.

"Master can't come," returned the man, bluntly.

"Can't come! What do you mean, man?"

"He have met with an accident!" blurted out the fellow.

"Ah!" burst from the bride's white lips. "Let me go to him." And, rising, she went towards the door, followed by all the others, and in a few moments they were speeding along the snow-covered roads as fast as the drivers dare go.

Meanwhile Mr. Stuart, after a hasty consultation with the groom, sprang into a dog-cart belonging to one of the groomsmen, and, whipping up the horse, tore along at such a rate that he out-distanced all the others.

A strange stillness seemed to lay on Forrnan. The winter sun shone on its hoary walls and casemented windows, lighting up the vivid green of the mosses and lichens that crept and clung over the rugged stones of which it was composed; but no sound came from within, only on the steps stood a group of scared servants and the jailor.

"Is—is—he dead?" faltered Aline's father.

"Yes, sir," returned the man. "He has been dead some hours."

"Good heavens! Who is to tell her?" and he looked along the road, down which was bowling at a great rate the barouche, horsed by the four greys, in which he knew were his daughter and wife.

He looked as though asleep, so peaceful was his expression. There was no time to be lost, and yet, weak and irresolute, he stood there, trembling and pale; and when Aline alighted from the carriage, in all her bridal finery, and saw his face, she guessed the worst.

"He is dead!" she cried. And then, as no one denied it, she threw up her hands, with a moan of anguish, and covered her face with them.

"Take me to him," she whispered, hoarsely.

"No, no!" expostulated her mother, laying a detaining hand on her arm. But for once she shook it off, and followed her father to the library, where Jock Gordon lay.

He looked as though asleep, so peaceful was the expression. There was no pain on the handsome face. There was a noble beauty on the marble brow; the long dark lashes lay like a fringe on his pale cheeks; the curves of his lips were set in a smile.

"The omen was true, then?" she murmured, as she stooped to kiss the clay-cold lips. "The ring did not break for nothing!"

"How did it happen? Of what did he die?" she asked.

And briefly they told her how the tollgate-keeper at Richter, about three miles from Forrnan, was surprised to find a dog-cart at his gate early that morning, and the laird sitting in it, apparently indifferent to everything surrounding him. Closer inspection revealed the fact that he was a corpse.

He was on his way back from Edinburgh; and although it was evident he had been dead some time, yet the horse's knowledge of the road enabled him to continue on the journey without guidance until the closed tollgate obliged him to pull up.

Heart disease of long standing, the doctors declared it, brought to a climax by the excitement attendant on his expected wedding.

Silently Aline listened, a tall white-clad figure, strangely out of keeping with the dusk of that still death-room; and then, when all was told, she stooped and kissed him once again, murmuring, "Poor Jock—poor love," and then turning, left the room with uncertain steps, leaning heavily on her father's arm; and he, for once in a way, took matters into his own hands, and drove her home to Dallerroon, and left her alone in the solitude of her own room to those sad thoughts that crowded so thickly on her.

She had not loved him, but she had liked and respected him, and his awfully sudden death was a fearful shock to her. Once again she saw him.

The night before the funeral, she begged her father to take her to that house which was to have seen the dawn of her married life; and he, notwithstanding his wife's objections, took her.

Silently she crept into the room, where he lay in his coffin—white flowers on his breast, and making a pillow for his head, their sweet fragrance breathing around on the air of the death-chamber—and laid the broken halves of the old wedding ring on his breast. No one else should ever wear it. He was the last of his race, and it should be buried with him. Then, with a last look, a last kiss, she left him, praying his soul might find that rest and happiness which it had missed on earth.

Ten years passed away. Aline's beauty

was not less, yet she was greatly altered. The old girlish look of innocent joy was gone, and in its place was one of chastened grief, vain regret.

To her mother's wrath and indignation, she refused all offers with serene coolness, though Mrs. Stuart was wrong in attributing the refusals entirely to Gordon's sudden and sad death.

She mourned him sincerely and revered his memory, yet ever in her heart dwelt the memory of Kenneth's blue eyes; and when, after years of waiting, he came to her a rich man, and finding her still unwedded, put that question which he had meant to put ten years before at the Cameron's gathering, she laid her hands in his, giving herself to him with a glad "Yes," knowing that at last she had reached a haven of rest and repose.

"And you really love me?" he queried, bending his blue eyes fondly on her.

"I have always loved you," she answered, simply.

"And—yet—once—you meant to marry another!"

"My mother wished it, and so did *he*," she responded, while a shadow for an instant dimmed the renewed brightness of her fair face; "and—you—left me."

"I did it for the best, Aline," he said, earnestly. "Believe me, I did. We must be cruel to be kind, sometimes."

"I know," she answered, gently, for she had gathered something of the truth, during the past years, regarding his abrupt departure.

"And you forgive?"

"Fully and freely."

"My own," and he gathered her to his breast—her rightful resting place—and kissed her lips with all the pent-up passion of ten long years.

[THE END.]

WAS IT A GHOST?

—30—

MADAME MARLOWE said, as we girls had a regular collegiate course, and could graduate with honours like the young men at —, we were perfectly right in calling our establishment Marlowe College.

At all events we did it, and there was a good deal of rivalry between our graduating class and that of the young men.

Great offence had been given by a professor who had said contemptuous things of us, which were reported through the brother of one of the girls, and we resolved to be as much superior to these college boys as possible, at the same time to have nothing to do with them.

We assumed plain cloth costumes and untrimmed Derbys; and even on holidays were bound to reply to any invitations from these young men, for concerts, or singing-school, or lectures, in a form that read as follows:—

"The approaching examination will entirely prevent Miss — from accepting any social invitations whatever."

And, moreover, we had heard that women were cowardly, and had "nerves and feelings." So we began to set these aside; played tricks on each other; gained such self-command that we could laugh when we found the sleeves of our gowns sewed up, or thistles in our beds, or shoemaker's wax in the toes of our walking-boots; and, finally, to encourage ourselves in well-doing, offered a prize to that girl in the graduating class who should play the most ingenious practical joke on the others before examination day.

By the way, this prize was a statuette of the Wounded Soldier, to which we had lost our hearts to a girl, and which was to be purchased by general contribution of half-a-crown each.

We had had some annoyance and much fun from this idea before it ended tragically; but I cannot say that there had been much

originality manifested, for salt in one's coffee, sugar on one's steak, and cold water on crisp toast, are not new stories, by any means.

Now all college-goers know that every college has a ghost. The building Madame Marlowe had established our school in had once been a veritable college in days when pupils were fewer. The principal of this college, Dr. Homan, lived in the building with his daughter, a lovely girl of eighteen.

A professor of languages—a foreigner of dark exterior and rude manners—fell in love with this girl, proposed, and was refused politely.

After this he did not, as behoved him, go his way in peace; but so persecuted her that she was obliged to ask her father to interfere. He did so, and warned the professor that if he again addressed his daughter he should be required to resign his class.

That evening Miss Homan disappeared. Days after her body, covered with wounds, was found in an old chest in the garret. The professor was suspected, arrested, and convicted of the murder, of which he made full confession on the gallows.

It was Miss Homan's ghost that haunted the upper corridor, and, it was said, appeared to the graduating class every year, until the old college was deserted for the new granite building on the hill, which was our envy.

Now it began to be whispered she had appeared to some of our girls. Ruby Proctor saw her first—to own to it. She declared the ghost a little creature, too small to be any of our girls but Sarah Sidney. But when she had seen it a second time, that suspicion was impossible, for the reason that Sarah sat amongst us at the study-table, as we could all swear.

Some believed it a trick of a competitor for the Wounded Soldier; others, with a belief in the supernatural, were terrified. Others felt it an honour to see the venerable old college ghost. We watched Sarah, but she, professing terror of the spectre, always kept herself in the company of some others, and was never known to be missing when the ghost was seen. It was really a great mystery.

One Sunday evening we had been to church, and had one hour of rest and chat in the reception parlour. People did as they pleased Sunday evening, for there was, of course, no study, and May Pryor had left the room to bring a pretty birthday card she had received from an English cousin, when we heard a shrill shriek in the hall, and something rolling down the staircase, and rushing out, saw May lying at the foot of the stairs, with face deadly pale, and hair all about her shoulders.

We picked her up, but she was quite insensible. We could not bring her to, and the teachers were either gone to their own rooms or still out.

"It must have been the ghost," some one said, "looking up the stairs; and then we screamed together, for we saw at the head of the stairs a figure that had frightened each in turn. It came down slowly, sobbing violently. As it came it snatched off a yellow wig, and brushed from its face a coating of powder; and we saw that it was Sarah Sidney; her white ghost costume still hung about her as she knelt down by May's side.

"I did not mean to frighten her so much," she said. "Is she dead? If she is, will they hang me? I deserve it!"

"Yes, you do," cried the girl, who had lifted May to her shoulder—her cousin, Martha Hill.

"You wretch, I hate you!"

Then others came, professors, teachers, the doctor, and they carried May away. She was taken home next morning, delirious, they told us.

By that time we had found out how Sarah Sidney had contrived to play ghost without being missed from her place.

She had a twin sister, Susan, as exactly like her as twins sometimes are, and as they always dressed alike, and Susan had but just come to the place, it was easy for her to take

Sarah's place when nothing very important was going on. The servants would take her for Sarah and let her pass in without question, and but for May's accident I think that Sarah Sidney would have taken our ridiculous prize. Now, however, we were all very miserable over it, and there would be no more fun that year, even if May recovered.

Alas! one morning we were all horrified by the report that the victim of Sarah Sidney's practical joke was dead. We hardly dared speak of it. As for Sarah, her grief was terrible, and she was firmly convinced that some fearful punishment awaited her.

So the great day came to us, as wretched a set of girls as you could meet on earth. Our preceptress knew nothing of the matter, as we hoped—of the prize we had offered for the best practical joke, or of Sarah's ghost playing; but it was on our consciences. We all felt guilty of murder.

And now, alas! retribution fell upon us. It is hard to convince people of such things in this sceptical age, but we began to see a ghost far worse than the spectre of Miss Homan could have been.

Ruby Proctor was the first, as before, to meet it; and she swore to us by all she held sacred that there could be no doubt whatever that the spirit of May Pryor had met her in the hall. She had even seen the cut on the forehead.

"I shrank against the wall," she said, "and all grew black before me; and when I could see again she was gone—but it was May!"

"Don't tell Sarah," said I. And we kept the secret until, one after the other, we had each seen our lost companion.

We could not doubt. There was no trick in this; no ghost-playing. There was no one in the class who would have played a trick of that sort on another now. We were haunted. It was very horrible, but it bound us closely together. We were like a secret society, with a fearful mystery in our possession, to which no one had the key. And Sarah had learnt somehow, and was in abject terror of seeing May herself. We slept together; always entered the apartment together. It was forbidden to lock doors at night, else we should have done so. But we drew our little bedsteads close together, and I often went to sleep holding Sarah's hand close in mine.

I had done this one night, and still kept it, when I heard a faint rustling sound at the door behind us. It was like that a woman's dress makes. And everyone was in bed in the great house. I dared not even cry out, "Who is that?" But I heard the soft, slow sound more plainly with every pulse-beat. It was approaching our bed. I think that I was braver then than I ever was in my life before, for I would have given millions for the support of the companionship of a human being, and I refrained from waking Sarah.

"It will be worse for her than it can be for me," I thought. "I pray that, if this is May Pryor's ghost, she may sleep through the visitation."

My flesh crept, my hair arose upon my head. I thrilled and shivered, and grew first hot, then cold.

My glimpse of the ghost had been slight, merely her figure passing across a passage at a distance. Now we should be face to face. Could I bear it and keep my reason?

Suddenly I felt both of Sarah's hands clutch mine. She had awakened.

"What is it? What is it?" she gasped. "Tell me! Tell me! Oh! Helen, tell me what it is!"

I could not answer. We clung together, and a pale violet light fell over the bed, and slowly, softly, a figure all in white, with flowing hair, came towards us and stood at the foot of our couch and smiled with May Pryor's smile, and lifted, as in blessing, May Pryor's slender white hands, and it was her voice that said,—

"Do not be afraid of me. Do not shrink from me. I come in love."

"Not in love to me, for I killed you!" sobbed Sarah.

"My dear," sighed the spirit, "I know you meant no harm. I forgive you. Be happy. I shall often meet with you. I shall always love you. I came to say so. Good night. Be happy."

"Oh, blessed angel!" gasped Sarah, "you have saved my reason."

"Be happy," sighed the ghost again. "Good night."

Then the light faded slowly, and all about us was music, one soft tune after the other, until at last, with the end of a low lullaby, silence fell. We sobbed ourselves to sleep in each other's arms, and the last words Sarah spoke that night were these:

"May always was an angel on earth. I always said that, Helen."

We went down to breakfast in an exalted state of mind, and seated ourselves in our places as those might who had had strange experiences. The girls entered one by table, the little ones gathering at a separate one, where milk and water took the place of tea and coffee. The seat that May Pryor had filled had never yet been occupied by any one else. It stood as usual, the plate before it. This morning Madame chose to breakfast in her own room, and Miss Robbins presided at the children's table. The head of ours was vacant, for the other teachers were not residents of the establishment.

The housemaid served us as usual; and, after her departure, I looked at Sarah to ask her with my eyes if we should tell our experience to the class. She nodded gravely; and I was about to begin, when the door opened and my mouth shut. A figure entered, dressed not in white, but in blue muslin; but, nevertheless, the figure of May Pryor. The hair had been cut short on her forehead, and she wore a little piece of sticking plaster upon it. She advanced to the table, and took her chair like an ordinary mortal, and merely remarked,—

"Don't stare so, girls, or your eyes will drop out upon your plates. Bless you, my children, I forgive you all, and I really think I have won the prize, especially since my last night's appearance with blue light and slow music. Eh?"

We sat thunderstruck, speechless, happy, angry, bewildered.

"I was hurt, you know," said May, helping herself to toast, and speaking between mouthfuls; "very much hurt. I came near going to Heaven; and when I got better I asked leave to come out of hours and get a little coaching for exam.; and I took madame into my confidence. So I had a chance to haunt you. Last night I came for good, and I brought my blue night-lamp—moonlight effect—and my musical-box—collection of soothing music—with me; and I fancy I have proved my talent for the stage. Pass me the potatoes, Sarah, I'm desperately hungry since my convalescence; and tell me truly, dear, did you always think me an angel?"

"I never shall again," said Sarah Sidney. "You almost killed me!"

However, it was Examination Day, and we were guiltless of blood, and pledged our honour not to wince at any joke whatever.

The Wounded Soldier was sent to May Pryor's home that evening. She had won the prize fairly. By the way, she won most of the other prizes too. We acquitted ourselves very poorly, we others. Our agitation had been great, our sorrow deep, while she had been cool and happy, and had had private coaching, and enjoyed herself greatly. However, we decided to consider it quite fair.

M. K. D.

We should always be slow in choosing a friend, and still slower to change him. We should always be courteous to all, and intimate with few; never slight a man for poverty, nor esteem anyone for his wealth.

FACILITIES.

A lover sent his sweetheart his own portrait by post. To save postage he wrote on the cover: "Samples. No value."

"What's the extreme penalty for bigamy?" asked a man of an old Judge, who answered—"Two mothers-in-law."

"Papa, have guns got legs?" "No." "How do they kick, then?" "With their breeches, my son."

An honest old farmer, on being informed the other day that one of his neighbours owed him a grudge, growled out: "No matter; he never pays anything."

BUTTONS: "Marm, will you please tell Master to stop ringing his bell, for Bliffins, who generally hangers it, is hout, and it hannels the cook."

SUE: "What a man you are, George—always making fun of the ladies' taper waists." He: "And what should I do with a taper but make light of it?"

At a dinner one day Mr. Porcine took his little boy aside and administered this reproof:—"Johnnie, you eat too fat and too much. You are a regular pig." "Yes, pa," acquiesced Johnnie, blantly. "Do you know what a pig is?" inquired Mr. Porcine, severely. "Yes, pa." "What?" "A hog's little boy."

"Really," confided Angelina to her dearest friend, "I am getting worried about John. Before we were married, a year ago, he used to pick me up in his arms as if I weighed ten pounds instead of 180; and now he says it tires him to hold the baby."

"JASPER, what did you do with the letter I left on my desk this morning?" "I took it to the post office." "What! Did you not see that it had no address?" "Yes, sir, but I thought you didn't want me to know for whom it was intended."

MR. TOMPKINS was waiting for Miss Minnie, and her youthful brother was entertaining him until his sister's arrival. "I say," he ventured, "your hair is black, isn't it?" "Yes." "Well, you dye it, don't you?" "No, what put that idea into your head?" "I dunno, only sister Minnie said the other day that she believed you were naturally light-headed." Mr. Tompkins has transferred his affections to another girl.

"You have some fine turkeys this morning, poultryer," said the schoolmaster. "Yes, sir; all fresh from Norfolk to-day." "What is the price?" "You can take your choice, sir. I have them at all prices." "Well, I want to give my boys a treat, but I do not want them to be too tender. There are a dozen here—pick out four of the toughest." The poultryer obeyed. "Here, sir, you have four of the toughest birds in my shop." "Thank you," said the schoolmaster. "I've changed my mind. I'll take the other eight."

At the breaking out of the Crimean War, Rachel, the celebrated French actress, was in St. Petersburg. Just before leaving the Russian capital, some of the Russian officers gave a banquet in her honour. One of them, a nobleman of high rank, said, in a bantering way, "We will not bid you good-bye, but merely say 'Au revoir,' for we shall soon be in Paris to drink your health in Claret or Rossmery!" "Monsieur!" replied Rachel, "France is not rich enough to treat all her prisoners of war to champagne."

An Irish gentleman, having received an invitation from a wealthy, but not over-refined lady, on arriving, was ushered into her presence. She was sitting in the library, surrounded by gorgeously-bound books. "You see, Mr. X," she said, "I need never be lonely, for here I sit, surrounded by my best friends." Mr. X. approached a shelf, and without replying, took down a volume, which he observed to be uncut, and immediately observed, with a most genial smile, "I am happy to find, Mrs. W., that, unlike the majority of people, you do not cut your friends."

FATHER (to spendthrift son): "Yes, my dear boy; nothing would give me greater pleasure than to pay off your debts for you. The only question is who's going to pay mine?"

A lady purchased a nice new door-mat with the word "Welcome" stamped thereon in glowing letters, and the first to come along and put his number eleven on it was a tax-gatherer.

"Why is your hair so grey, mamma?" "Because you are such a naughty child sometimes." "What a naughty child you must have been! Poor grandma's hair is quite white!"

Before they are married she will carefully turn down his coat collar when it gets awry; but, afterwards, she'll jerk it down into position as if she was throwing a door-mat out of the window.

NIECE: "You don't look well, aunt; let me get out that bottle of old port the squire sent you." Aunt: "Do 'ee, my love, and be careful to give it a good 'ard shake to stir up all the sentiment, then I'll be sartain sure to get the real flavour."

BOBBY was very much impressed by the remark of the minister at church that man was made of dust. "Ma," he said, after a thoughtful silence, "was I made of dust too?" "Yes," she replied. "Well, how in it, then, that my birthday comes in January? There ain't no dust in January."

It was remarked at the opera, recently, "What a lot of married people there are here to-night!" "How can you tell they are married?" was the query. "Don't you see?" was the answer; "the men don't do any talking, and there's hardly a corsage bouquet among the women."

"MOTHER," said a young wife, "would you mind cooking the dinner to-day? It would please John, I know. He complains so much of the new girl that I shall discharge her the moment I can get another." "Certainly," replied the old lady, cordially. At dinner John said to his wife, "Mary, that new girl seems to be getting worse and worse."

COACH (to College Athlete): "Your muscles seem soft, and your whole system needs toning up. Are you drinking anything?" College Athlete: "Not a drop." Coach: "Smoking to excess?" College Athlete: "No." Coach: "Studying?" College Athlete: "Er—yes, a little." Coach (indignantly): "Great Heavens, man! do you want to lose the race?"

THERE is a good story to the effect that a distinguished lawyer, who had engaged a passage to America with a friend, received a telegram while saying farewell to his friends on the deck of the steamer, and immediately ordered his luggage ashore. "What does this mean?" "It's too bad, but I can't go," said the learned gentleman; "one of my richest clients has just died, and if I don't stay to look after the estate his heirs will get all the money!"

A BOY'S COMPOSITION.—The following story comes from a school in the Midlands. The master told the boys to write a short essay on Columbus. The following was sent up by an ambitious essayist:—"Columbus was a man who could make an egg stand on end without breaking it. The King of Spain said to Columbus, 'Can you discover America?' 'Yes,' said Columbus, 'if you will give me a ship.' So he had a ship, and sailed over the sea in the direction where he thought America ought to be found. The sailors quarrelled and said they believed there was no such place. But after many days the pilot came to him and said, 'Columbus, I see land.' 'Then that is America,' said Columbus. When the ship got near, the land was full of black men. Columbus said, 'Is this America?' 'Yes, it is,' said they. 'Then I suppose you are the niggers?' said he. 'Yes,' they said, 'we are.' The chief said, 'I suppose you are Columbus?' 'You are right,' said he. Then the chief turned to his men and said, 'There is no help for it; we are discovered at last.'"

Why is there nothing like leather? Because it is the sole support of man.

"Is it true," asked the professor, "that a trombone player saved the life of Frederick the Great?" "It is," replied the student. "How?" "Frederick killed him."

"Why do they always paint angels as blondes?" asked Mrs. Krank of her husband, as they stood looking at a picture. "Because," answered Mr. Krank, looking at his wife's dark hair, "artists' wives are generally brunettes." There's a frightful frigidity in the atmosphere about the Krank Mansion now.

A STRIKING RESEMBLANCE.—When Dumley isn't behind in his rent he is apt to be outspoken to an offensive degree. "Do you know why, Mrs. Hendricks," he said to his landlady recently, as he laid a soft-boiled egg which he had just opened as far out of his reach as possible, "do you know why you and this egg are somewhat alike in one respect?" "Why?" she asked, with frigid interrogation. "Because you have both seen better days."

IN A BIG HURRY.—"If I buy some dress material," asked a lady in a draper's, "can you deliver them at once?" "Yes, m'm," said the young man. "There will be no delay?" "No, m'm," said the young man. "Because I am in great haste." "Yes, m'm," said the young man. "Very well, you may show me your summer silks." In four hours and forty minutes the lady had selected what she wanted, and the tired young man ordered the goods to be delivered at once.

NO FURTHER USE FOR THE DOG.—Wife (reading the paper): "Well, I declare if that isn't the queerest thing I ever heard of." Husband: "What's that?" Wife: "Why, here in the paper is an account of a wedding in Manchester, and among the wedding presents was a bull-terrier, given to the bride by her father." Husband: "I don't see anything odd about that. She was the old man's youngest daughter, wasn't she?" Wife: "Yes; but what has that got to do with it?" Husband: "Why, of course, if she and all the rest were married, he had no further use for the dog."

"FIXED!"—"I am a lawyer's daughter, you know, George dear," she said, after he had proposed and been accepted, "and you wouldn't think it strange if I were to ask you to sign a little paper to the effect that we are engaged, would you?" George was too happy to think anything strange just then, and he signed the paper with a trembling hand and a bursting heart. Then she laid her ear against the middle vest-button, and they were very, very happy. "Tell me, darling," said George, after a long delicious silence, "why did you want me to sign that paper? Do you not repose implicit confidence in my love for you?" "Ah, yes," she sighed with infinite content, "indeed I do! But, George dear, I have been fooled so many times!"

HE CLEARED A SOVEREIGN.—Mr. Kuhn was thrifty in money matters, but cared little for his own personal appearance. He had worn the same old greasy overcoat until his sons were ashamed of him, and tried to induce him to buy a new one. "Oh, no," the old gentleman would say; "I would rather have the five pounds it would cost." One day the sons determined that he should wear a new coat, and, believing that if he could get one at a good bargain he would buy it, arranged with a tailor to sell him a £5 one for £2, they to pay the difference. Then they went home, and told their father what a handsome coat they had seen, and what a bargain it would be to buy it. So the father went and looked at it, and took it and started for home. But when he reached home he had no coat with him. "Didn't you buy the coat, father?" "Yes; got it for £2," replied the old gentleman. "Where is it?" "Oh, I was showing it to a friend in the 'bus, and when he offered me £3 for it I let him have it. I cleared a sovereign on that transaction."

SOCIETY.

THE PRINCE OF WALES received from his Cornish property last year only £57,000, whereas his income therefrom has reached in some years over £70,000.

At the Duchess of Westminster's ball, the Princess of Wales was attired in mauve velours frisé, the front being of tulle of the same colour, spotted with pearls. Princess Christian wore cream tulle, with the same coloured satin trimmings, lined with deep red. Princess Louise of Lorne had a dress of dark green tulle. Princess Mary Adelaide wore blue satin, trimmed with white lace; her daughter, Princess Victoria, was in a very pale shade of blue, trimmed with lilies of the valley. In the opening quadrille the Prince of Wales danced with the hostess, the Princess giving her hand in this dance to the Duke of Westminster. Prince Albert Victor was in the same set with the young and charming Princess Victoria of Teck.

THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF CONNAUGHT, who have been on a tour in Her Majesty's yacht *Osborne*, have returned to Kent House, accompanied by their three children, and will reside in the Isle of Wight for some time.

PRINCE CHARLES OF DENMARK, second son of the Crown Prince, has been on a visit to the Prince and Princess of Wales from his ship at Leith, which he has now rejoined.

PRINCESS FREDERICKA OF HANOVER and her husband have concluded their visit to Coburg, where Baron Fawel von Rammingen has been in attendance for some time on his father, who succumbed lately to a long-standing illness. Her Majesty has again lent Abergeldie Mains to the Princess and her husband, who in all probability will shortly proceed thither, after a few weeks' rest at Hampton Court.

THE DUCHESS OF HOLSTEIN SONDEBURG, who is now on a visit to Prince and Princess Christian at Cumberland Lodge, is the widow of the Prince's eldest brother, Duke Frederiek, who died about five or six years ago. The Duchess is the younger sister of Prince Hohenlohe (Count Gleichen) and mother of Princess William of Prussia.

THE DUC D'ANJALM intends to stay at his place near Evesham, in Worcestershire, where he purposes to remain about three months, proceeding thence to his estate in Sicily for the winter.

On the 20th ult. was celebrated, at St. Paul's Church, Knightsbridge, the marriage of Sir William Eden, Bart., of Windlestone, county Durham, with Miss Sibyl Frances Grey, daughter of the late Sir William Grey, K.C.S.I. It was solemnised at three o'clock.

There were two pages in attendance on the bride, her brother (Master Spencer Grey) and the bridegroom's nephew (the Hon. Ashley Eden), and six bridesmaids, four of whom were children.

The two eldest ladies were dressed in white mousseline de soie, with large cream silk sashes, which formed a kind of drapery across the front, and the bodices had a full scarf of the muslin fastened on one shoulder with a bow of cream ribbon, the ends terminating with loops of the same, and wore bonnets of cream tulle, trimmed with cream velvet. The children's frocks were also of mousseline de soie, but were made differently, they being much trimmed with Valenciennes lace, with long full fronts and Toby ruffles of lace. They had mob caps of the mousseline, trimmed with bows of yellow ribbon, and broad cream sashes.

All carried bouquets of yellow carnations, tied with yellow satin ribbons, and wore pendants forming two hearts entwined in pearls and pink coral, the bridegroom's gift.

The bride was attired in rich white duchesse satin, the petticoat being of Brussels lace, looped with satin ribbons, and a large spray of orange blossoms was fastened on the bodice.

STATISTICS.

"DEATHS FROM STARVATION."—The Parliamentary return of the number of deaths in the metropolitan area for the past year on which coroners' juries have returned verdicts of "death from starvation" or "death accelerated by privation" gives a total of thirty-seven deaths resulting from starvation or disease accelerated by want of food, and of these fourteen were in the central division of Middlesex, eighteen in the eastern division, one in the western division, two in the Greenwich division of Kent, one in the Newington division of Surrey, and one in the Camberwell division of the same county.

COAL AND WINE DUTIES.—An account for the year ending May 31 last of certain funds administered by the Corporation of the City of London under various Acts of Parliament has just been issued. It refers, amongst other matters, to the coal and wine duties, the amount collected on the former being £386,938 6s. 3d., and on the latter £3,753 11s. The amount returned on coals re-exported was £72,008 10s. 3d., and the expenses of management were £4,112 3s. 2d.; thus leaving the sum of £319,571 3s. 10d., which was paid into the Bank of England to the credit of the Thames Embankment and Metropolis Improvement Fund. As much as £226,189 11s. 3d. was raised upon coal brought into London by rail, and £169,947 17s. 3d. upon coal brought by sea, leaving a very small quantity to be conveyed by canal and road.

GEMS.

DISCRETION in speech is more than eloquence.

MALICE drinketh up the greatest part of its own poison.

CONTRIVENCY equalizes fools and wise men in the same way—and the fools know it.

THERE is often room for much courage in speech, courage not so much to maintain opinions as to confess ignorance.

WHEN a strong brain is weighed with a true heart it seems to be like balancing a bubble against a wedge of gold.

To reprove small faults with undue vehemence is as absurd as if a man should take a great hammer, because he saw a fly on a friend's forehead.

THOSE with whom we can apparently become well acquainted in a few moments are generally the most difficult to rightly know and understand.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

ESSENCE BOTTLES.—Carbonate of ammonia, four ounces; sub-carbonate of potash, one ounce and a half; oil of cloves, five drops; oil of cinnamon, four drops; oil of rosemary, three drops; musk, two grains; essence of lemon and bergamot, of each ten drops; camphor, six grains; spirits of wine and strong hartshorn, of each three drachms. Powder the camphor and ammonia coarsely, then add the other ingredients, rub them together for two minutes, fill the bottles, and stop close. The composition is equal to any that is prepared.

FLESHING GLUE.—This superior kind of glue is used by cabinet-makers for fine work, particularly for veneering. It differs only from ordinary glue in being made from the better and fresher parts of skins, which are first rinsed in several waters, then left to soak in cold water for three or four days, that they may require less boiling to reduce them to the proper glutinous consistency. When dissolved the liquor is strained, and being somewhat carefully dried, so that when cold it may be cut like a jelly, it is made up in thin small cakes.

MISCELLANEOUS.

It is easy to tell when others are flattered, but not when we ourselves are; and every man and woman will lend firm belief to the soft nothings of the very man they believe to be an arrant flatterer when others are in the case.

YOUNG MARRIED PEOPLE.—Young married folk, in these extravagant days, too often begin wedded life with a grand flourish of trumpets, furnish a house extravagantly, also give expensive entertainments, and in the end come to grief. When all fails, their household goods are probably sold under the hammer, or the firm from whom they have obtained them on the instalment plan, steps in and takes possession for non-payment. Then there is likely a separation; the young man goes one way and the young woman another, and if they are ever reunited it is because they have come to the conclusion that this is a practical world, and that people cannot live beyond their incomes without being overtaken with monetary disaster. In a word, if they dance they must pay the piper. In view of all this it would be better for them to begin in a moderate manner.

ANIMALS IN EPPING FOREST.—The only wild fallow deer in England, says a modern writer, are those native to Epping Forest, although at one time they were plentiful enough in other parts. They are of a dark brown colour, small in size, and with horns less branched than other varieties. They are exceedingly shy, and one may walk the forest for hours without catching sight of them. The red deer, which are larger, bolder, and far handsomer than their fallow brethren, are still occasionally to be met with in the less frequented parts of the forest. The roe deer, which became extinct in England before the present century, have recently been again introduced into this great London playground, and although personally I have not been lucky enough to see a specimen of this old English variety, one of the verderers assures me that they are increasing and take kindly to their new quarters. There are plenty of foxes in that part of the forest known as Monk wood, and hares and rabbits run riot in peaceful security all over the place, for be it known, none but the keepers are allowed to shoot any living thing in Epping Forest, and they are only allowed to bring down the hawks and jays, who otherwise would play sad havoc among the feathered songsters. The fierce and blood-thirsty stoats, as also weasels and squirrels, are frequently to be seen in the fern-clad dells and shady forest drives. Polecats, badgers, and martins, too, are now and again encountered, hedgehogs and shrews are plentiful, and there are a few harmless snakes, while, although the dreaded viper is known to be indigenous to the district, it is happily becoming exceedingly rare. So favoured is this district by the feathered tribe that I despair of giving the names of one half of the song birds having their home in the forest. The thrush, the blackbird, the linnet, and the robin may not perhaps, inaptly be styled the leaders of the forest choir. Their early morning chant and evening vesper is one of the most delightful features of this charming slice of English wood. Soon after daybreak, when few save the keepers, the proverbial early worm, and the ever punctual sun have risen, the forest melody begins. The sharp, saucy note of the chaffinch is heard from the topmost branches of the silvery moss-tinged birch; the bullfinch pipes his lay cheerily, as he sits hidden amid the sylvan glories of the sturdy oak; from out the dark recesses of the tapering fir the goldfinch twitters and whistles his greeting to the newborn day; from high above, the rich, mellow throat-song of the lark falls earthward, while the metallic "clut-clut" of the cruel hawthorn affords the one discordant note in the blithe charms of feathered minstrelsy.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

W. L.—The article named is patented. A good substitute to make the beard grow is beef-marrow.

LMO.—It depends entirely upon the terms of the will. There ought to be no difficulty in seeing a copy of it, and then you could ascertain for yourself.

LEDA.—Weak, brittle finger-nails may be strengthened by rinsing them occasionally in a solution of alum and water.

J. S. W.—The complexion is not affected by plain food, however much it may be by the grosser kinds. Partake sparingly of both meats and vegetables. 2. Let all hair dyes alone.

CONSTANT READER.—1. Kindly in future use initials or some more definite signature. 2. Lime-water is of little use for the purpose, or any drug. The best plan is to live simply and well, and take plenty of outdoor exercise.

L. M. M.—There are various recipes for the treatment of burns. When the burn is comparatively slight, simply inflaming the skin, covering it up with flour, and then placing a layer of cotton over it, so as to exclude the air, makes a very good dressing. Lard, deprived of salt, also makes an excellent application. For blisters, beat up an egg with two tablespoonfuls of olive or refined oil, spread it on soft linen, and apply to the affected part.

FOURLED.—The functions of the spleen in the human being have not as yet been satisfactorily explained by anatomists; consequently, we cannot state positively that the pain and shortness of breath after running are caused, as you claim, by the dilatation of that organ. Nor are we able, we regret to say, to give any information relative to the actions of that portion of a horse. Perhaps a veterinary surgeon could give you some information on the subject.

G. J. F.—The Thames is the largest and most important river of England. From London to its mouth, nearly sixty miles, it is navigable for vessels of 800 tons, and for vessels of any burden to Deptford, three miles south-east of London-bridge. Its tide is perceptible as far as Teddington, 72 miles above its mouth. The whole course of the Thames is about 230 miles. It is crossed at and above London by numerous bridges, and several tunnels pass under it. At London Bridge it is about 300 yards wide.

G. R. L.—For poisoning by ivy it is recommended to bathe the poisoned parts freely with spirits of nitre. If the blisters be broken, so as to allow the nitre to penetrate, more than a single application is seldom necessary. Rubbing wet salt on the affected parts has sometimes a good effect. Another remedy is the following: Bathe the poisoned parts thoroughly with hot water, without soap. When dry, paint the places liberally, three or four times a day, with a feather dipped in tincture of iodine. Avoid bringing the tincture in contact with any fresh wound or excoriation.

A. L. C.—Blood rain is a shower of grayish and reddish dust mingled with rain, which sometimes falls on vessels off the Atlantic coast of Africa and Southern Europe. The dust of these showers is made up of microscopic organisms. There was once a shower near Cape Verd which was 1,600 miles wide, and extended more than 1,000 miles from the coast of Africa. Lower showers have fallen in Italy, reddish snow at the same time appearing on the Alps. The red colour is owing to the presence of a red oxide of iron. The origin of the dust is not known.

B. J. M.—Birds of Paradise is a name given to birds noted for the extraordinary development of their plumage. The long-tailed paradise bird has a tale more than two feet long, glossed with most beautiful colours, and broad plumes springing from the sides of the breast. Balaia and Singapore are the chief ports whence these birds are exported to Europe. The best known species is the greater paradise bird, whose body is about as large as a thrush, though the thick plumage makes it appear as large as a pigeon. The head, throat, and neck are covered with very short dense feathers of a pale golden colour on the head and hind part of the neck. The fore part of the neck is green-gold; the breast chestnut, inclining to purple. From the nature of their plumage these birds cannot fly against the wind. They are shy and difficult to approach.

E. M. N.—To clean wall paper, cut into eight portions a loaf of bread two days old. It must be neither newer nor staler. With one of these pieces, after having blown off all the dust from the paper, by means of a good pair of bellows, begin at the top of the room, holding the crust in the hand, and wiping lightly downward with the crumb, about half a yard at each stroke, until the upper part of the paper is completely cleaned all round. Then go round again, with the like sweeping stroke downward, always commencing each successive course a little higher than the upper stroke had extended, until the bottom be finished. This operation, if carefully performed, will frequently make very old paper look almost equal to new. Great caution must be used not by any means to rub the paper hard, nor to attempt to clean it the cross or horizontal way. The dirty part of the bread, too, must be continually cut away, and the pieces renewed as soon as they may become necessary. To take grease stains out of wall paper, mix pipe-clay with water to the consistency of cream, laying it on the spot, and letting it remain until the following day, when it may be easily removed with a penknife or brush.

DORA.—1. The gentleman should be introduced to the lady. 2. Nowhere. Astrology is perfect humbug. 3. Fair writing.

LITTLE DOT.—1. Dark brown hair; its possessor, if blessed with dark brown eyes, would undoubtedly be a brunette. 2. Yes. 3. Very good writing.

EMMIE.—The line which you quote—
"Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,"
will be found in Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard."

LOUISA E.—1. We must respectfully decline to give a recipe to produce paleness. 2. Yes. 3. The 6th January, 1870, fell on a Wednesday. 4. A very pretty shade of brown. 5. Maggie is a nickname for Margaret, and means a pearl. 6. Writing fair.

W. W. R.—You are rather dilatory in discovering that your position is unsuitable to you. Before enlisting you should have ascertained the nature of a soldier's duty, and not rushed blindly into an occupation which has in two years' time become distasteful to you.

R. L.—1. Glycerine diluted with a little borax-water will generally remove blackheads, and sometimes freckles. 2. A pomatum made of beef-marrow is said to be good for promoting the growth of the hair. 3. Your weight is above the average. Your handwriting is quite fair.

WHICH WILL SHE MARRY?

Our Jennie is a charming girl,
And all who know her love her well,
But which of those we call her beaux
She loves the best, 'tis hard to tell.
For she is pleasant with them all—
Tom, Dick, and Harry, George and Fred,
And Malcolm too. I wish I knew
Which one she really means to wed.

She freely talks of Tom and George,
And praises Harry's dashing ways,
Tells of some trick performed by Dick
And others in their younger days,
Without a blush, or guilty sign,
That might to lookers-on impart
The secret she keeps well, since we
Know not who has secured her heart.

With Malcolm she is less at ease,
Though he's a youth I much admire;
Is very shy when he is by—
The reason why I must inquire;
And though his deeds of manliness
Put all his comrades in eclipse,
Our Jennie says naught in his praise,
His name is never on her lips.

Is that the case? So plainly, then,
Is Jennie's cherished secret writ,
I wonder you, and others too,
Have been so long in reading it;
For Malcolm is the chosen one!
Thus does the modest maid proclaim
She loves him best—the truth she confessed—
Because she never speaks his name.

J. P.

W. R. H.—The case is a very simple one. If you are so well impressed with the lady, and are sure she will make a good wife, press your suit. Your being plain may possibly affect her choice; if it does, then she does not live you well enough to be your wife. But, in writing, tell her plainly all about yourself, your circumstances, and wishes, and appoint an interview. Treat the matter not as one begging a favour but as a gentleman seeking an honourable and worthy alliance.

L. H. S.—The young lady referred to acted in a manner which it would be difficult to excuse even on the score of ignorance of the proprieties of life. It may have been thoughtlessness on her part; still, at the same time, she must have been fully aware of the obligation taken upon herself when she became your affianced. You should carefully weigh the chances of a recurrence of a similar nature before uniting yourself for life to one who appears to think so lightly of a really serious and binding obligation. Endeavour to obtain a full explanation of her unwarranted conduct, and if you find her unworthy of the love you have shown, do not hesitate for a moment in severing a tie which might in after years bring sorrow to both parties concerned.

H. H. S.—Liniments or washes to promote the growth of the hair can always be employed, with greater or less success, so long as there is any vitality left in the hair-follicles or roots. If, on the other hand, these are entirely dead or destroyed, there is no possibility of producing a new crop of hair. This will be evidenced by the shining or glistening appearance assumed by the scalp under such circumstances. The loosening of the hair which frequently occurs in young and middle-aged persons will generally, if not attended to, become real baldness. On the contrary, if proper care is exercised, the hair will grow fresh and assume its pristine condition. The practice of immersing the head in cold water morning and night, drying it thoroughly, and then brushing it until a warm glow pervades the scalp, is found to produce salutary effects. When baldness occurs in patches, the skin should be well brushed with a soft tooth-brush, dipped in distilled vinegar, morning and evening.

LADY LILIAN.—1. Apply to the Foreign Office. 2. The lady should rise and bow unless it is a very intimate friend. 3. If she choose to extend her hand, there is no harm in it. 4. Moderate.

D. M. G.—Diamonds were found in Cape Colony, South Africa, in 1867, and one, the "Star of South Africa," found in 1869, weighed 46½ carats, and was valued at £25,000.

A. A. P.—To remove sunburn the following recipe will be generally found efficacious: Powdered borax, six drachms; glycerine, half an ounce; rosewater, twelve ounces. Mix. Apply at night, and in the morning wash as usual in clear water. If exposed to the sun daily, repeat the application every night.

C. H. W.—The "harvest moon" is the moon near the full at the time of harvest, or about the time of the autumnal equinox, and rises immediately after sunset, at about the same hour, for several consecutive days. This phenomenon is accounted for by the small angle of the ecliptic and the moon's orbit with the horizon. We hope you understand all this, but unless you are a student of astronomy you probably will not.

L. E. Z.—To clean glass globes, if the globes are much stained on the outside by smoke, soak them in tolerably hot water with a little washing soda dissolved in it. Then put a teaspoonful of powdered ammonia into a pan of tepid water, and with a tolerably hard brush wash the globes until the smoke stains disappear. Rinse in clean cold water, and let them drain until dry. They will be quite as white and clear as new globes.

TOM.—"Attic salt" is a term used to denote the delicate wit and flavour of the conversations of the ancient Athenians. Athens was the principal city of the province of Attica, in Greece, and its people were renowned for their refinement and elegance; and Attic, as an adjective, means "marked by such qualities as were characteristic of the Athenians," as Attic faith, Attic purity, Attic style, Attic wit.

S. B. T.—Of course it is nicer to wear slippers for dancing parties which match the colour or trimmings of the dress; and to wear boots which match the dress or its trimmings upon other dressy occasions; and black may be worn with everything and white and all light tints. Black makes the foot look prettier. The arched effect and Louis Quinze heels are still the most fashionable. It is extremely bad taste to wear boots in the streets with uppers which match dresses. These are for carriage use.

V. C. T.—1. It is a matter of taste. The one condition necessary is that your betrothed be pleased with it. 2. Get the young lady's consent, and then in a manly fashion speak to her father and mother. 3. Ask the young lady. 4. Depends on circumstances. 5. It is very little indeed, and would require great economy and personal sacrifices on both sides. 6. Consult your own conscience. There would be no harm if the young lady is over twenty-one and consents, and you let the parents know of your determination at the same time. 7. It does not at all follow.

B. R. R.—Cayenne pepper is prepared from the pods of the chill or bird pepper. The ripe pods, dried in the sun, are placed in layers with wheat flour, in a dish or tray, and exposed, in a half-cold oven, until perfectly dry. They are then removed from the flour and ground to a fine powder. To every ounce of this powder fifteen ounces of the wheat flour are added, and made into a dough with a little tepid water and a teaspoonful of yeast. After fermentation is well begun the dough is cut into small pieces and baked in a slow oven until perfectly hard and brittle. It is then beaten or ground to powder, and forms cayenne pepper.

B. L. M.—There is no reason why you should give a present unless you desire to do so and will not be inconvenienced by the expense. There are many pretty and inexpensive gifts—books, pictures, transparency vase, hand-glass, cup and saucer, lovely bit of pottery, ivory hair-pin box, card-case, scent bottle, bouquet holder, &c. If you do not go, send your visiting-card to the bride and the bride's parents the day of the wedding, or the day previous. You may write "regrets" for enforced absence, and "congratulations" upon it if you choose. Enclose each card in a small envelope and place the two envelopes in a larger one, which address to the bride's parents.

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